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Annette Krauss with contributions from Feminist Search Tools working group, Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide, Nancy Jouwe, KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, Ferdiansyah Thajib

Unlearning Routines of the Impos-

Edited by Annette Krauss and Janine Armin

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Unlearning Routines of the Impossible

Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons
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Unlearning Routines of the Impossible

7 Foreword
by Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide

11 Introduction and Acknowledgements: Practicing Unlearning

23 In the Vortex of Institutional Lives
with Ferdiansyah Thajib

41 Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)

75 Wall Patrols

79 On Unlearning Sedimented Practices:
Stories Involving Everyday Whiteness and Quick Fixes
by Nancy Jouwe

95 Instead of Solving Paradoxes and Contradictions

123 Bodies to Think With

127 Hidden Curriculum

167 Letters: The classroom is burning,
let's dream about a School of Improper Education
by KUNCI Collective & Study Forum

201 Tired in Archives

205 Re- and Un-Defining Tools: Exploring Intersectional Approaches to
Digital Search Tools in Library Catalogues
by Feminist Search Tools working group

223 Afterword: Unlearning as a Scaffolding for Living

239 Bibliographies
253 Biographies
256 Colophon

Foreword
by Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide

As a German native, Annette Krauss only began practicing the English she had been taught in school when she was in her twenties. She once shared with me how this comparatively late age of learning our ever-expanding neoliberal lingua franca has informed her approach to text. To this day, when a word is unfamiliar to her, she breaks it apart to singularly address each piece of the still unfamiliar term "split[ting] English open so its dark histories slide out" (Park Hong 2020, 97). Krauss breaks a word wide open to explore its grammar and etymology before reconstructing its parts in order to contextualize the new word's composite meanings.

This makes reading, especially collective reading with Krauss, very slow—furthered by her pedagogical demand that the group move at the speed of the slowest person. I have compounded experiences of reading/learning alongside Krauss in such group settings, namely in the context of her co-founded initiative Read-in (2010–present). The collective reading project "experiments with the political, material, and physical implications of collective reading and the situatedness of any kind of reading activity."[1] Read-in was developed in the context of the living research project *The Grand Domestic Revolution: User's Manual* (GDR, 2009–12) initiated by Binna Choi, former director of Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, where I was working as a producer at the time. GDR followed American architectural historian Dolores Hayden's eponymous 1981 book that considers the work of material feminists. In an effort to free themselves from domestic servitude, they organized collective services at the turn of the last century in North America. The white women proposed communal neighborhoods with collective services such as common kitchens, dining rooms, laundries, day-care centers, and new building types that challenged the physical separation of household from public space and the economic separation of the domestic from the political economy. Casco's GDR in turn sought to challenge the notion of social design and asked what a contemporary domestic revolution might look like. In other words: the project investigated ways to recognize and value the very labor, often performed by people from the Majority World we are socialized by

1 See Read-in, www.read-in.info/about.

"white supremacist capitalist [hetero]patriarchy" (hooks 1994, 298) to invisibilize. The question invites reflexivity, positionality, and an undressing of oppressive internalized norms to habituate more liberatory practices.

This reverse learning of individual contribution to patterned oppression is some of what is at stake in Krauss's long-term Unlearning project, with factions that range from (un)learning Property Relations to Busyness/Business to Care Networks. This project in some senses is a toolkit designed by Krauss and her collaborators to respond to and transform out of the cycle of reproducing harm. On an individuated level this may look like the mantra popularized by Grace Lee Boggs: "transform[ing] yourself to transform the world." Krauss's pedagogical toolbox is tested in institutional frameworks like the art academy, having recently been teacher and course leader of the Master of Fine Art program at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht and now sharing a professorship at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and in the art institution—especially Casco Art Institute. In both, how we transform ourselves and the institution away from harm is at stake, where education is invoked as a practice of freedom across these domains.

Krauss identifies the separation between domestic and public domains, the front and back end of the institution. This has been valuable for me as a curator in addressing the trap of representational politics that take place at the front—through exhibition making where art organizations are concerned. For those who choose to hold institutions accountable, race and sovereignty scholar Karen N. Salt makes a case for the role of the reviser to "shift the terrain by moving away from the becoming to the disorganised, unfinishedness that we determine" (2022, 92) This is transformation on the terms of the oppressed and marginalized.

Here is (part of) the bind: the institutions from which we imagine and practice *getting free* of are not exempt from the "white supremacist capitalist [hetero] patriarchal" harms one tries to shed. Naturally so because the subjects that are involved in splitting open and revising institutional structures, uphold the structures we need to be getting free from. And as scholars Marina Vishmidt and Kerstin Stakemeier point out in their foreword to the 2018 book *Unlearning Exercises: Art Organizations as Sites for Unlearning*: "The institution commons itself in a way that both presupposes and projects the dissolution of the institution as currently constituted. Yet in order to do so, it must both have and provide infrastructure. So, what is the institution? Is it a concatenation of habits, of possibilities, and ethics plus the power to put them into operation?" (2018, 7). During the weekly Unlearning sessions at Casco, which shaped many of the exercises you will find

in the aforementioned book (*ibid.*, 17–55), the team was also instrumentalized by virtue of being in the institutional space. A constant tension lay within the fact that we needed to double our labor in order to unpack our labor; our everyday institutional tasks did not disappear, and were ultimately tied to the funding bodies that subsidized our work and paychecks, which we were all disproportionately reliant on. Looking back at the Unlearning Property exercise, which tried to take stock of our respective, generationally determined resources, the exercise could have resulted in differentiated engagement after addressing exactly how white supremacist capitalist [hetero]patriarchy was at play in the room. Could we have thought through a system of reparations? The (Un)learning project is thus a prompt and invitation for the engagers to dig deeper, root, and situate their individual political concerns.

A way forward—Krauss and I have many teachers in common from people who have lived and taught toward an end—is to apply the methodological unpacking that Krauss also insists on, to cross the boundaries of race, gender, and status, a process by which we make community through the address of difference. The trick perhaps is to also remember the fluency (Un)learning requires of us to individually assess how we assert knowledge, when we stand still, and when we engage. Community across boundaries requires trust built over time. It's been over a decade with Annette Krauss. Trust in turn affords us latitude with each other as we learn to change.

Introduction and Acknowledgements: Practicing Unlearning

The struggles, entanglements, and joys of practicing unlearning in predominantly Western contexts connect the contributions of this book. Each text and author holds a profound relation to the artistic, institutional, and collaborative work in which I have been involved for more than a decade. As a whole, the publication echoes its 2018 companion *Unlearning Exercises: Art Organizations as Sites for Unlearning* co-edited with then Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons team members Binna Choi and Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide, and editor Liz Allan. That book had grown out of a long-term collaboration with Casco and focused on unlearning with regard to organization-specific exercises within an art institution. It stands in a vivid dialogue with my PhD project completed in 2017 titled "Sites for Unlearning: On the Material, Artistic and Political Dimensions of Processes of Unlearning." The follow-up collection that you are reading right now, examines what it means to practice unlearning through building on correlating sites by writing (about) them. Several collaborators have been invited back to contribute new and previously published essays, while my texts as part of my artistic practice set the stage for and follow some of the long-term projects of the last fifteen years. Four forms of writing across timescales are included, and distinguished also by font: reprinted conversations that situate collaboration in action; acknowledgements, citational info, front and back matter; new essays by colleagues and revised treatments of the Sites for Unlearning (2011–present) artistic projects that grapple with unlearning's artistic, material, and political dimensions;[1] **and short scenes that conjure bodily capacities and rhythms while addressing "critical impulses that hover unarticulated on our tongues and that flourish in what some are already saying and others of us cannot hear" (Stoler 2016, 36)**. Finally, as I detail at the end of this introduction, while these texts have been written in close collaboration

1 *Hidden Curriculum* (2007–present); *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given* (2008–12); *Site for Unlearning (SFU) (Zwarte Piet)* (2011–present) overlapping with *Read the Masks* (2008–12); *SFU (to Ride a Bike)* (2012–present); *SFU (My Library)* (2013–present); *SFU (Art Organisation)* (2013–20); *Unlearning Center* (2020–present).

with, or in the vicinity of colleagues, students, and friends, I attempt to work through problematic issues concerning the "we" of and in the West, and in my own texts.

My unlearning work builds on the insights and energies developed in social movements and alternative education, as well as feminist, de/post/anticolonial address of everyday norms central to academic canons, forms of institutionalization, and white innocence (Andreotti 2011; Fanon 1967; Spivak 1993; Wekker 2016).[2] To the debates on what unlearning might be and do within these areas, I introduce artistic practice. Unlearning here embraces a working through of normative structures and practices that includes becoming aware, attending to, and getting rid of taken-for-granted "truths" of theory and practice. As a crucial part, I investigate the potential of unlearning to unsettle dominant concepts of learning that undergird practices of transformation and social change (Tuck and Yang 2014).

In the Vortex of Institutional Lives with Ferdiansyah Thajib (2022)

This opening conversation with social and cultural anthropologist Ferdiansyah Thajib sets the tone for working through in action, practices of collaborating in relation to positioning, formal-aesthetic questions, and ethics. As we carve out the particular tensions in our (working) lives at the time of writing, we examine why we keep doing what we do, while aiming at "continually and collectively doing things differently." Frictions, openings, and dead ends are brought together with the troubling conjunction of radical education, artistic production, and institution-making in a European context. This conjunction is specifically apparent, as Thajib and I elaborate on, in the context of the neoliberal financialization of European higher education entrenched in coloniality.

2 Postcolonial, decolonial, and anticolonial theory and practices are understood here as processes that try to deconstruct and undo unjust, hierarchical power structures and their effects, based on centuries-long colonization through modernity's imperial projects — hence the term modern-colonial. The effects manifest themselves right up to this very day, e.g., in the unequal distribution of material resources, in a white, Western dominance in academia, or, in extractivist processes and land dispossession (to name only a few). While I aim at working with these terms in tandem rather than in competition with each other, it is also important to distinguish between anticolonial, decolonial, and postcolonial theories and practices because they adhere to different geographies and traditions of thought (see, e.g., Bhambra 2014; Hiraide 2021). In this text, I insert postcolonial, decolonial, anticolonial when I refer to a specific scholar from the postcolonial, decolonial, or anticolonial tradition.

Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet) (2011–present)

Titled after an ongoing project, this text revisits the project *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given* (2008–12) with artist Petra Bauer, activist group Doorbraak, and cultural group Untold. *Read the Masks* attempts to resist the racist figure Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) in the Netherlands, and practice unlearning without framing it as such. I consider the struggles against Zwarte Piet, the roles that artistic practice may take, and the question of how (if at all) I can think, write, and practice solidarity while being embedded in Western coloniality.

On Unlearning Sedimented Practices: Stories Involving Everyday Whiteness and Quick Fixes by Nancy Jouwe (2023)

Nancy Jouwe offers a follow-up to "Site for Unlearning in the Museum" from *Unlearning Exercises*. The cultural historian brings together palpable vignettes that address white innocence (Wekker 2016) and the harm of quick fixes. In so doing, she provides insights into her municipal work in the Netherlands addressing public apologies for slavery, and antiracist training sessions by a white facilitator.

Instead of Solving Paradoxes and Contradictions (2013–present)

Following *Unlearning Exercises*, and *Site for Unlearning (My Library)* (2017–present), this essay provides a practical grounding for unlearning in postcolonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's working concept "unlearning one's privileges" (Spivak 1990, vii). Instead of trying to solve the paradoxes within one's life, to address the injustices in a globalized world Spivak proposes "learning to play the double bind" by "learning to live with contradictory instructions" (2012, 3). The essay situates the work of unlearning in bodily experience that is always already material, raced, gendered, classed, and sexualized. The goal becomes intervening in taken-for-granted understandings of un/learning that underlie aesthetic education and artistic production.

Hidden Curriculum (2007–present)

This text revolves around the eponymous project on valid and invalid learning in secondary school settings. Common sense understandings of formal and informal processes of learning are tackled to consider the importance of physicality and the boundaries of academic and art environments. Framed by critical and feminist pedagogies, *Hidden Curriculum* came to be a guide for the *Sites for Unlearning*. These experimental gatherings involve unlearning something *collaboratively*. That is, studying unlearning with regard to existing articulations and unpacking "learning economies" (Masschelein et al. 2006) derived from European knowledge economies (Phillips 2018; Krauss 2018).[3] As elaborated in *Unlearning Exercises*, the vulnerability of unlearning in institutions (corporate or otherwise) is critical where unlearning can legitimize workforce flexibilization. At Casco we studied and practiced unlearning with regard to institutional habits, complicating how to write/practice/study unlearning in an art institution amid a fierce economic regime. This approach directed the project toward social reproduction and maintenance at the nexus of the back and the front of institutional frameworks, which in turn has inspired future iterations of *Hidden Curriculum*.

Letters: The classroom is burning, let's dream about a School of Improper Education by KUNCI Study Forum & Collective (2020)

This conversational piece revolves around tools and tooling in alternative education. The letters provide a critical fabulation on how "improper" in "School of Improper Education" can become a tool that challenges knowledge hierarchies and builds toward a relational epistemology of truth.

3 In *Unlearning Exercises*, lifelong learning as a dominant learning concept in the strategic implementation of knowledge-based economies in Europe since the 1990s is explored as a progress-oriented accumulative model that pervades institutions. While writing these introductory notes, Casco launched the *Unlearning Center*. As a companion in this critical endeavor, I understand it as an educational, practice-led, and relationality-driven commitment that facilitates the process of unlearning institutions toward commoning societies with art practices as a mode and tools for unlearning. Within the im/possibilities of unlearning, *Unlearning Center* continues the collective attempt to generate cracks of possibilities in the interest of unlearning.

Re- and Un-Defining Tools: Exploring Intersectional Approaches to Digital Search Tools in Library Catalogues by Feminist Search Tools working group (2021)

The Feminist Search Tools (FST) working group—consisting of members of Read-in (Sven Engels, myself, Laura Pardo) and Hackers & Designers (Anja Groten), as well as Aggeliki Diakrousi, Ola Hassanain, and Alice Strete—give insights into their work with digital library catalogues and searching (for information), building on a feminist legacy. Reflecting on tooling and tools, they elaborate on how library categorizations are troubled by the trickle-down effect of capito-patriarchal white institutions, leading to a desire for smooth interfaces and an aggregation of algorithms. As the *Feminist Search Tools* project emerged from the *Site for Unlearning (My Library)* (2013–present) by the Read-in collective (2010–present),[4] this conversation speaks to the collective's feminist practices of reading and citation.

Afterword: Unlearning as a Scaffolding for Living

To close the book, I round off with a project not covered in the other texts, but which has co-shaped the work on unlearning: *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)* (2012–present). As I note there, "The sites for unlearning attempt to bring together the three elements described: the practice-oriented artistic approach of situation making, a feminist understanding of knowledge production, and the questions and demands posed by de/post/anticolonial scholarship." The afterword can also be read as a relational glossary of practices and ideas. As such, practicing unlearning is articulated in relation to forms of organization, arts-based research, writing, and collaboration. Unlearning grew out of these relations, which, as I note in the afterword, attempts to intervene "in a Western standard notion of learning … at a small scale with an eye toward the big, in concrete (institutional) settings." They cannot be thought without "feminist, de/post/anticolonial" methodologies that inform "this artistic investigation into unlearning, insofar as they address academic canons, corporeality, coalition building, forms of institutionalization, and everyday norms as a central part of their agendas."

4 See also the Feminist Search Tools project platform in 2023, www.feministsearchtools.nl.

The Different I's and We's

The collaborative work to which I am committed—and the ambivalences within me and others that I stubbornly and lovingly attempt to acknowledge—consist in neither a unified I nor we. Feeling and sensing relations as I go, I work through where I and we write and speak from. This political maintenance work clarifies the we that are speaking, pointed to, or forgotten. It spells out when an I desires to speak and needs to be held responsible, but also has the capacity (in rare moments) to surpass the individual self. Additionally, footnotes and project credits indicate we's and I's in person. In the conversation with Ferdiansyah Thajib, a collective voice (A + F) brings readers closer to a long-term practice of holding connections and contradictions, where a fragile we becomes possible with an I (A or F) coming in for situatedness. KUNCI's "Letters: The classroom is burning, let's dream about a School of Improper Education," reveals manifold temporalities of pronouns as protagonists converse; the we in *Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)*, *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)*, and *Hidden Curriculum* stems from practicing with specific groups of people over a duration. As the storyteller in the latter, I decide to focus on this and not on that, and while these essays saw different iterations, the reworking of these texts allows one to go back to collaborators, but also for other people to contribute to thinking and reading together. You, as reader, may join a temporal we among "epistemic allies" as Thajib and I call the practitioners whose concepts, images, and toolings accompany us "in what seems an (im)possible task": creating a scaffolding for living as a practice of unlearning. There are so many I want to thank for developing this with me.

Acknowledgements

I owe this book to many longstanding exchanges with friends, allies, and colleagues. Numerous collaborations go into producing and receiving the texts. Relations have woven this book. So I take the opportunity here to find ways to acknowledge each of these.

Specific credits can be found in the project-focused texts "Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)," "Hidden Curriculum," and "Afterword." These texts start with the collaborative engagements that created the bodies of work on which this publication is based, and continue by naming individual contributors. My questions

have emerged from intense discussions about what an unlearning practice would look like in various politico-aesthetic-educational-institutional formations; I am only one among many participants.

The work with Read-in, a self-organized collective I have been involved in since 2011, is close to my heart. Our ongoing experiments with the political, material, and physical implications of collective reading (the wor(l)ds that we are a part of) have been crucial in approaching what remains at the same time dear and opaque to me: the practice of reading and its relation to unlearning. Thank you to Hyunju Chung, Sven Engels, Elaine W. Ho, Serena Lee, Sanne Oorthuizen, Laura Pardo, Ying Que, Marianna Takou, Maiko Tanaka, Hilde Tuinstra, and Leo Vargas. Thank you to all the people engaging with us on the way; not the least those who let us in to read and think together in their houses, or to discuss at the thresholds of their front doors. www.read-in.info.

For the Feminist Search Tools (FST) research, Read-in joined forces with the collective Hackers & Designers (www.hackersanddesigners.nl). The FST work group consists of Aggeliki Diakrousi, Hackers & Designers (Anja Groten, André Fincato, Heerko van der Kooij, and previous member James Bryan Graves), Ola Hassanain, Read-in (Sven Engels, myself, and Laura Pardo), and Alice Strete. The project's findings, impasse, and twists are made accessible on a web platform that brings together a range of prototypes, forms of tooling, and discussions aimed at critically and creatively studying the digital search interfaces of library catalogues. www.feministsearchtools.nl.

Not only with Read-in have I developed a soft spot for participating in reading groups—especially when actual reading takes places during sessions. It's a way of enacting and experiencing what livings happen in a book, or between the lines of a text that (sometimes) brings to life different energies across times and spaces. I want to specifically thank Das Kollektiv, Linz, around whom, at the time of writing, a changing group of readers have organized themselves to focus on radical education for more than three years—especially Amalia Barboza, Sofia Bempeza, Luzenir Caixeta, Kim Carrington, Tyan Fritschy, Natascha Khakpour, Radostina Kostadinova, Niki Kubaczek, Gergana Mineva, Jan Niggemann, Rubia Salgado, Isabella Schlehaider, Ruth Sonderegger, Damijan* Stranner, and Adriana Torres Topaga. I am very grateful to Claudia Hummel; together we have organized many reading sessions of math school books and developed exercises for reading, counter-counting, and listening. Also, thanks to the many other reading groups whose hospitality I have dearly appreciated.

First iterations and experiments of parts of this book began during the Research Master of Gender and Ethnicity at Utrecht University (2010–13) and my PhD trajectory (2013–17), followed by the Elise Richter Peek 495 postdoctoral grant from the Austrian Science Fund (2018–23), the latter two at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

Engaging with various institutional study environments, while going off on my own paths in life and with my artistic practice, has continuously nourished and challenged my thinking and doing around unlearning in institutional settings. The manifold discussions during these periods have greatly contributed to the work toward unlearning in this publication. Looking back at the time of the Research Master and PhD, this period helped me co-build ethico-practical scaffoldings that support (my) practices and work on unlearning since then; the postdoc constituted a time of maintenance, recalibration, and collective harvesting. I am very grateful for the friendships that continue on from these periods through which we revisit, witness, and un/learn from our different scaffolds of living.

The postdoctoral position enabled me—also during the Covid-19 pandemic—to find ways to continue the work on unlearning in different registers and constellations, including: the Feminist Search Tools working group; collaborations with KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, and specifically Ferdiansyah Thajib and the conversational piece in this publication; the work with Casco Art Institute leading to the *Unlearning Center*; and the research platform A Matter of Precedents at Collective Gallery in Edinburgh. The many other contributions and presentations in conferences, exhibitions, conversations, and other formats significantly shaped my work toward unlearning.

The last five years were also shaped by my institutional work at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht as teacher and course leader of the Master Fine Art (MAFA). This institutional environment has challenged my thoughts and practices on unlearning and provided the possibilities to test and discuss aspects in the HKU Fine Art department with colleagues, students, and alumni. I am specifically grateful to the MAFA team, many guest lecturers, students, the Tools for the Times study group facilitating ten Open Study Sessions on practicing inclusivity in art academic contexts, and the MAFA research group investigating artistic⁘educational∞relationalities in an art academy context. The discussions on art and education, the experiments through and with it, as well as the continuous efforts to question how we want to and can work together in this context have guided many directions of thinking and doing around unlearning. Special thanks here

go to Tiong Ang, Christina Della Giustina, Ola Hassanain, Nancy Jouwe, Nuraini Juliastuti, Katia Krupennikova, Falke Pisano, Domeniek Ruyters, Manju Sharma, Henk Slager, and Julie Yu.

My engagement with unlearning cannot be thought without the people, practices, and worlds at Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons in Utrecht. To be able to experience, and be part of the discussions, struggles, and joy that the work with Casco, its different teams over time, and ecosystem brings about has crucially molded my engagement with what is around, through, and in me. We realized together several assemblies on commoning art institutions with the focus of unlearning art institutional habits. Together with Ying Que and the Casco team we organized the assembly *Elephants in the Room* in November 2018 with a focus on art-educative and decolonial questions. Thank you to members of the network Another Roadmap to Arts Education, especially Lineo Segoete (Lesotho) and Sofia Olascoaga (Mexico City), and members of the Global South network of mid-scale art spaces Arts Collaboratory: Al Ma'mal Foundation with Aline Khoury, Más Arte Más Acción with Ana Garzón Sabogal, and Visual Arts Network of South Africa with Kabelo Malatsie. For the other Casco assemblies so far, I have had the honor of participating in the steering group.

This publication follows, accompanies, and complements the earlier *Unlearning Exercises* publication unfolding a web of connections through its core subject and further contexualizations. I thank Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide for the foreword in which she highlights some of these connections. I leave it to readers to wander between these publications and invite you to join the emerging *Unlearning Center* at Casco Art Institute.

I want to specifically thank the shifting team at Casco Art Institute over time that has insisted on continuing unlearning, and finding ways to cope with the co-nundrum in practice: Janine Armin, Cee Bakker, Ester Bartels, Steyn Bergs, Leana Boven, Staci Bu Shea, Binna Choi, Luke Cohlen, Lara García Díaz, Roel Griffioen, Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide, Aline Hernández, Simone der Kinderen, Marleen de Kok, Malcolm Kratz, Björn van de Logt, Niek van der Meer, Sanne Oorthuizen, Rosa Paardenkooper, Jakob Proyer, Anne Punt, Ika Putranto, Ying Que, Deborah Sielert, Whitney Stark, Marianna Takou, Suzanne Tiemersma, Mariejem Tordjo, Judith Torzillo, Erik Uitenbogaard, Jason Waite, Sofie Wierda, and Amaia Yoller.

It is in this context that I came in contact with designer Rosen Eveleigh with whom many collaborations around how to share the work on unlearning with a wider public have arisen, among which the design for *Unlearning Exercises* Tear Pads and

publication, and now this book. Special thanks go as well to Janine Amin for her brilliant work as editor at large, her encouragement, and keeping me in focus toward this publication. Thanks to Stevphen Shukaitis and Minor Compositions for not giving up on me and this project when Covid-19, and other life challenges delayed this publication for years.

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I can only repeat myself in what comes: what would I do without my family and friends? I am deeply indebted to you!

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Annette Krauss
Vienna, March 2024

In the Vortex of Institutional Lives

with Ferdiansyah Thajib

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Annette + Ferdiansyah

Following on from a series of conversations that have been taking place sporadically between us in the past years, the current contribution serves as another opportunity to address ways of living multiple institutional lives. In our respective contexts, these pertain to different types of institutions, ranging from art school/academy, to university, to art or cultural organization/collective. Here we explore ways of traversing the boundaries and frictions between radical classroom practices and the institutional processes and frameworks that we speak and act within and against in the context of European higher arts education; all these environments are deeply entrenched in coloniality. We are drawn to radical classroom practices that experiment with forms of sociality that go beyond the dominant, modern-colonial model of meritocracy that dictates our lives in the academy and the labor market. We are interested in un/learning from accounts of educational practices in the lineage of pedagogues including Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Ivan Illich, Sandy Grande, Eve Tuck, Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Fred Moten/Stefano Harney.

All these thinkers and practitioners share a perspective on education not as the solution to a problem but as a part of the problem (while still they engage in educational-institutional practices themselves). This is a relevant shift in our understanding of the politics of education, and pedagogy, as we study together (in) learning environments.

In terms of format, the conversational piece takes place among three interlocutors: Annette, Ferdi, and a collective voice (Annette + Ferdi), which acts more as a meta-narrator (and provides the reader with this lead-in). Additionally, this three-way conversation is scaffolded, heckled, and haunted by a constellation of images, metaphors, concepts, or models developed by various thinkers and practitioners whom we consider our epistemic allies. These intellectual contributions have not only been crucial in accompanying our thinking process, working, and living, but they bring about real consequences in what seems an (im)possible task. These intertextual relations are continually rehashed throughout this conversation.

Hence, we invite you, the reader, to brace yourself for a form of storytelling that has no clear end or beginning. We present here a narrative device that allows us to move back and forth through scenes of connection and contradiction, commuting along and bridging the artificial boundaries between theory and practice, as well as folding in and out of bodily experiences, differential temporalities, and conceptual insights. Not only is this mode of articulation bound to our approach to writing this highly edited conversational piece, it approximates our critical thinking in the act as a practice of vulnerability deeply informed by our educational practices.

Annette

I am interested to discuss with you, Ferdi, how anti-xenophobic practices and discourse are able to enter classrooms but not necessarily the administrational-managerial levels of the art academies I have worked and studied in. I experience these institutions as places that time and again fail to be sites where students and staff can un/learn, and engage in anti-racism and anti-xenophobic behavior. Equally important, I try to grapple with my own complicities in this. How could we approach these sites of failure without repeating the obvious? Namely, the institutions that I am part of lack rigorous policies and actions regarding, for example, the employment rates of Black, Indigenous people, and people of color, or the gender pay gap, tokenism, Eurocentric curricula, or ableist and classist agendas, nor do they have strategies to overcome the excuses not to do so. While these are important facets that need to be changed, I see them also as violent symptoms of a centuries-old modern-colonial system that seem impossible to fix.

In this vein, I am searching for ways to tackle forms of coloniality entrenched in the institutions we are living with and working in. Part of this is what Gloria Wekker describes as "bringing the history of the colonies and the history of the metropole in conversation with each other" (2016, 25). For example, instead of assuming a separation between colonialism and Western institution-building, I try to find ways to think and do them together. The practice of separating or hiding away the coloniality of Western institutional practices and knowledge has been passed on over generations, largely in the form of tacit knowledge. I am in the thick of it, because the modes of control of social life, and of economic and political organization that emerged and have been engineered in(to) the colonies actually directly had and still have an impact on the ways we form institutions, schools, universities, ways of living and learning, and how we relate to each other—hence the term "modern-colonial." My intuition is that the institutional boundaries and frictions between classroom and the administrational-organizational sphere stem from this separation.

Let me explain my work situation during the last four years. While I accepted 40 percent employment as the course leader of a Master of Fine Arts program at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht, I also found money for a partial postdoctoral position at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, through which I navigate, for the time being, my artistic practice and the collaborations that I am involved in. This complicated but privileged constellation provides the economic framework for being able to accept the invitation by Tom Holert and Sven Spieker for this conversational piece with you, Ferdi. And I am very grateful that you are interested in engaging in this experiment.

The reason why I accepted the job in Utrecht is very much related to the separation between the classroom and other parts of the institution. Course leadership resides at the nexus between classroom and admin-orga-managerial work within an art educational institution. I am very concerned, on the one hand, with studying the structures, interpellations, and demands from the institution (e.g., back office, top management) concerning what I am supposed to do and not do, and with my agency within this sphere. There are a lot of institutional energies channeled into keeping the (artificial) boundary between the classroom and the rest of the institution intact. While I am being asked on a daily basis to embody the artificial boundary in this specific job, I also try to find ways of re-politicizing it. This entails, on the other hand, together with a team, trying out the ways that organizing/teaching/learning this nexus can enter the work undertaken with the students without pawning off responsibilities to the students, but including it instead as part of the study of and work within social-political-aesthetic formations.

Doing this work, I am always in the middle of a kind of messiness. It's a messiness that I don't see as necessarily negative (Haraway 1994, 62), but it makes me dizzy. It reminds me that I am always already part of certain relations, practicing certain habits of thinking and doing, that I am more or less aware of. It is also not about sorting this mess out and being done with it. I am/we are always already part of a specific (messy) situation, its orientations and power relations, as much as this situation is also made and shaped by me. I believe that to attend to the spatio-temporal, embodied, and inherent material relationalities is crucial for my ability to co-shape this situation. This is a sort of humbling and encouraging mantra that I repeat to myself. Against this backdrop, I wonder how can I be involved in these struggles within and against these institutions, and how can we narrativize our various involvements, implicatedness, and engagements differently?

Ferdi

The messiness that constitutes my lifework can be visualized as a turbulent vortex, formed through a cumulation of entanglements with whatever lies in our surroundings. These accumulated things continue twisting and overlaying on top of each other, without stopping or providing any sense of clear direction.

One thread that would quickly pull me into the vortex of structural problems in higher arts education, is what you said about "hiding away" the coloniality of Western institutional practices. This aspect is the freshest in my mind because not long ago I attended an online talk by Peggy Piesche,[1] a Black feminist activist in Germany who works for the Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb). There she explained how intersectionality is

neither an option nor an opinion, it is a personal approach. She invited us to think about what is hiding in plain sight, not as a negative critique but an engagement with those who (or whose voices) are not at the table.

Reading what you said about modern-colonial institutions made me think of why in the past I tended to keep such institutions at arm's length. In the first years after moving to Berlin in order to complete my PhD, apart from working on my research focused on the affective lives of Muslim queer people in Indonesia, I spent most of my time focusing on KUNCI Study Forum & Collective's work,[2] which is mainly grounded in Yogyakarta.

This is despite my various engagements with different European institutions as a member of KUNCI as well as with those related to my university study. While I was fully aware of and affected by the structural exclusions that you mentioned, I had some qualms about trying to change this situation. My priorities then were more about staying afloat and keeping my mental health supported. I kept on telling myself that this is not my fight, I won't be staying here in Europe for good, anyway. There was this pessimism (or was it realism?) that in retrospect appears as a form of refusal—not wanting to get sucked into and be burdened by the institutional vortex that should have expired already, but somehow managed to continue.

But all of this reluctance actually took me to a very different place. Later on, I started to get invitations to give talks and workshops touching on issues of commoning, listening, and other practices related to unpacking colonial practices within wider institutions. Some of these moments perhaps fit with what you describe as radical classroom practices. I worked with librarians, art school students, and art teachers in art spaces and public gatherings in various places. Again, these invitations mainly came about due to my involvement with KUNCI, especially in the School of Improper Education, which was set up in 2016 as a refuge from hegemonic forms of education.[3]

But as I took on this role, the ambivalence remained. There is something traumatizing in witnessing how the endless amount of critical labor that has been performed by Black and Indigenous people and by people of color, including myself, is continuously being appropriated by modern-colonial institutions to ensure the institutions' own flourishing. Calling these the "habits" of European arts education is perhaps an understatement, as it evinces

1 For event details, see www.pocolit.com/en/events/a-feminist-exploration-intersectionality.
2 See www.kunci.or.id.
3 See "Letters: The classroom is burning, let's dream about a School of Improper Education" by KUNCI Study Forum & Collective on pages 167ff in this book.

more of a prevailing logic. This logic is being rehearsed and refined both within the field of arts education and in broader higher education settings, and has been construed in many guises. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) describe how in universities this process occurs through the subsuming of critical education into perfecting professional education. While assuming color blindness and announcing demands for diversity and equality, the hierarchization of differences that is inherent in the teleological functioning of modern institutions ultimately always already dictates whose lives are worth living and whose are not.

While perhaps what we have been working on gestures toward more dissenting spaces, how is it possible to sustain these spaces if the colonial conditionings of modern institutions remain unmovable? But I am getting ahead of myself. For those who have been repeatedly subjected to structural exclusion, the broader concern is: why do we want to inhabit institutions that have refused us to begin with?

Annette + Ferdi

The image of institutional lives as a vortex intrigues us both: the feeling of being pushed, sucked into, pulled, thrown out — sometimes gently, at other times not so gently at all — while each of us is individually pushing, sucking, and pulling, but also gliding, drowning, resurfacing. This vortex that intermingles with many other vortices, which operate like magnetic fields, constantly reshuffle our understanding of center and peripheries and make us rethink the inside/outside dichotomy, especially when it comes to our own positioning toward modern institutions and, accordingly, what these categories of inclusion and exclusion mean and do. Attending to the force of vortices does not mean simply being overwhelmed by them, it also entails their active shaping and crossing of their elements. In the language of critical pedagogy, the different elements constituting a vortex have been identified as the four i's of oppression: ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppressions. These are also the major stumbling blocks that have turned up again and again in our exchanges. In the essay "Vistas of Modernity," decolonial scholar Rolando Vázquez Melken evokes as well the image of the vortex by focusing on its double movement: the centrifugal (centering) movement of modernity that enforces an eccentric movement that "expels out of history into oblivion what it devastates" (2020, XXII). We keep in mind Vázquez Melken's imagery of the vortex of colonial difference here while thinking of the extent to which its repercussions spiral into our ongoing struggles with multiple institutions.

In our May 2019 workshop at the HKW (Haus der Kulturen der Welt) in Berlin, which was held in the framework of *bauhaus imaginista* curated by Marion

von Osten and Grant Watson, we worked with Andrea Fraser's understanding of the institution as an entry point to discussing multiple institutional lives: "So, if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a 'totally administered society' or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside of ourselves" (Fraser 2005, 104).

It is worth revisiting this statement from our perspective of the messy experiences of the vortex. While Fraser has tried to blur the boundaries between what constitutes the inside/outside of institutions, we embrace and go beyond them by practicing self-positioning that emerges from complex entanglements.

Ferdi

One of the things that stayed with me after the workshop in Berlin was the moment when we got heckled by the person who was supposed to be our discussion partner. "It's messy, even the workshop initiators [Annette and Ferdi] admitted that!" the man said. On the one hand, perhaps he was just describing what he saw. He might have said this upon viewing the many pieces of paper and thread that we used to map out the workshop participants' input, scattering them around on the floor. But what I could not avoid is the accusatory tone in his voice. It implicitly suggested that we, as the workshop conveners, didn't know what we were doing — that it was so messy that no clear results would come out of it. The irony here is that this was precisely the situation that we wanted to generate. The "messiness" in this sense becomes a generative tool: rather than asking how to cope with or clean up the mess, we ask, what conditions of doing and living can we find there?

Annette

I believe this situation could teach us something about the unsettling nature of dealing with messiness and uncertainty in educational settings. In the workshop, we studied together with participants where practicing simultaneous institutional lives might lead us, grappling with the local specificities (Utrecht, Berlin, and Yogyakarta) and trying to resist comparison. Not to forget, we introduced a broad understanding of institutions (which is also important for this conversation) ranging from formal, legal organizational entities to customs, routines, and habitual patterns that form the fabric of our lives. We searched for ways to expose and bear certain contradictions, implicatedness, and messiness without wanting to solve these conditions too easily. I understood from his response that he was offended by this mode. It reminded me of other educational situations when I had underestimated the affective power of having to deal with uncertainties and implicatedness. I did not succeed in introducing a scaffold when

uncertainties, messiness, and contradictions explicitly took center stage. While I myself try to practice on an almost daily basis how to attend to these vortices, I cannot assume the same will be true for collaborators or students. I think we might have gone too fast and too slow at the same time.

Ferdi

In hindsight, the Berlin episode made me think about the "call to order" that Moten and Harney talk about (2013)[4] — the idea that a certain order needs to be established before knowledge can be produced. Their question, as well as mine, is, what happens when we refuse this call to order?

This brings us back to refusing what has been refused to us. I am thinking now about the demand for decolonizing art institutions and museums that has gathered force and momentum across Europe. Some of the steps for decolonial transformation have been taken, for example, by inviting non-Western artists to rework museum collections or to become part of strategies for diversifying the art institutions' representational politics. A few years back, a similar invitation arrived through KUNCI's email address, asking us to join a residency project themed around decolonizing knowledge.

One immediate concern was what this politics of invitation represented. Our collective ways of doing have been constructed along a shared desire to find another route of making and disseminating knowledge when all available means to do so have been held hostage by elite institutions for too long. The very existence of the inviting institution has been reinforced by colonial practices, and these enduring legacies have made us wary. Furthermore, although this invitation came with an intention to involve others for a better world, the uneven power and accumulated resources that condition this politics of invitation signaled the risk of making ourselves once again vulnerable to exploitation.

All these forewarnings ended up providing us with the impetus to accept the invitation, albeit tentatively. The decision was partly galvanized by the possibility of reclaiming the framework of decolonization that was being introduced by this institution. With this double burden, such an ambivalent "yes" was doomed to be followed by a constant exchange of "no's" between us and the host institution. The entire residency stay has been filled with refusals coming from both sides: "No, we can't do this; no, there is no access to that; no, it is impossible to make it happen; no, we don't have the time or resources to do this," and so on. The final refusal from KUNCI came at

4 See also Annette's reference to their notion of call to order in this book, namely in "Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)" from page 49ff and "Afterword: Unlearning as a Scaffolding for Living" on pages 223–37.

the end of the residency, when we rejected the idea of making the fruits of our labors into something the institution could keep as part of its property/collection.

Another possible route of active non-engagement, I think, lies in persisting with the experiential values of knowledge, or as another member of KUNCI, Rifky Akbar Pratama, describes it, "by keeping secret in practice." This resonates with Édouard Glissant's (1997) notion of opacity, which he defines as an alterity that is unquantifiable, a diversity that exceeds categories of identifiable difference. In my own practice, I operationalize this idea by insisting on telling stories of becoming rather than being; by emphasizing the necessity of understanding projects of decolonizing, commoning, antipatriarchy, and antiracism as unfinished processes that happen throughout our lifespan, which also go beyond the time we spend within certain institutions, and perhaps even beyond the life course of the institutions themselves.

Annette + Ferdi

In doing this conversation piece deep into the Covid-19 pandemic, we've been grimly reminded of the urgency of structural revision. As many others have said, the pandemic has worked like a magnifying glass on the conditions we live in on a global and a local scale, including the art academies in Europe. The levels of distress that most of the students, and especially non-European students and students from socially disadvantaged families, have encountered made this all too clear. The problems that have been simmering in the background, ranging from precarious housing situations and the loss of (side) jobs, to uncertainties about residency permits and struggles to pay tuition fees, have been laid bare. The bigger institutions have offered little help in response, aside from disciplining strategies. The fierce struggle around the redistribution of resources has become more blatant. It is about time for these institutional practices to die.

With regard to time, although the vortex metaphor seems to collapse time and space, at its core this metaphor suggests speed, which is often distinguished as the temporal condition of the twenty-first century. We counter this assumption by invoking a plethora of temporalities that are experienced in the vortex of institutional lives within this conversation. Media theorist Sarah Sharma helps us understand the temporal dimensions of institutional entanglement. In her book *In the Meantime*, she focuses on how inequalities increase "when the dominant way of apprehending time is guided by the discourses of speed-up. ... [W]hat most populations encounter is not the fast pace of life but the structural demand that they must recalibrate in order to fit into the temporal expectations demanded by various institutions, social relationships, and labor arrangements" (2014, 138).

Yet, still, what does it mean to say that it is time for certain institutional practices

to die, and what is the temporality of this institutional death? Once more, we come up with divergent understandings of the roles taken and responses made when it comes to dealing with institutional death.

As a conceptual ground, we've looked at the ideas conceived by Vanessa Andreotti and her colleagues, who later founded the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures collective.[5] Their collective work explores the notion of decolonization and how the term is taken up and (mis)used in the institutional practices playing out in soft-reform, radical-reform, and beyond-reform institutional settings of higher education. As a radical form of decolonial practice, they refer to the practice of "hospicing" modern-colonial institutions, working toward the "necessity of enabling a 'good' death through which important lessons are learned through the mistakes of the dying system" (Ahenakew et al. 2020, 53). Attending to the already collapsing modern global capitalist system will take more than accelerating its death before it is ready to go: "Hospicing enacts a willingness to learn enough from the (re)current mistakes of the current system in order to make different mistakes in caring for the arrival of something new" (Ahenakew et al. 2015, 28) The vortex image is also brought up by the collective when they describe hospicing as "the imperative to walk steadily with the eye of the storm without knowing where it is headed: move either too fast or too slow and one gets swept up and up thrown around in the vortex of change" (Ahenakew et al. 2020, 53).

Ferdi

The connotation of hospicing is perhaps still too romantic, as it invokes forms of care and support that are provided for those with terminal conditions, so their quality of life can be maintained before arriving at a "good" death. In my experience, the idea of institutional death has taken form in a far less pastoral manner. One of my closest encounters with institutional death occurred in a workshop that I co-organized with the Visual Art Network in South Africa (VANSA) in Johannesburg in 2018 as a part of our collaboration as members of Arts Collaboratory, a self-organized network of twenty-five arts and cultural organizations in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and the Netherlands.

During the workshop, in which artists and cultural producers from southern Africa participated, the term "aiming to die" came up often. It points to a complex layer of experiences that were shared by some of the workshop participants with regard to the call to sustain one's artistic practice and sociopolitical engagement amidst an art funding system that only pays heed to measurements of success and growth, while ignoring exhaustion, failure, and its

5 See www.decolonialfutures.net.

own exploitative orientation (Thajib 2019).

These stories are also all too familiar in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. As a collective that has been in existence for around two decades, KUNCI has witnessed how other collectives and arts and cultural organizations in our local environment have struggled with these challenges. Some of them did not make it. In a way, it is a privilege for us to have remained existing and to be able to share these stories now. But being able to survive for almost two decades as a collective has also brought to light questions about a possible end to our life course.

This question emerged around five years ago. Some of the KUNCI members were growing older, moving to new places, embarking on new fields of work or study, and building families. We asked, after working for a relatively long time against the status quo of past generations, how were we positioned among the current generation? Did the fact that we still existed after so much time implicate us in the status quo of the present time? The initial response to this existential anxiety was the usual push forward: We should transform ourselves again (as this had been our common approach in life). But then came follow-up questions: Why did we want to transform ourselves? Out of fear of being associated with the status quo? So that we could stay relevant? What would a "good" death look like for our collective life?

This preoccupation inadvertently led us to delay the collective's termination, a decision marked by the founding of the School of Improper Education. Through the school, we learned with others (the school participants, mainly) about how to let go of our educational habits without having to rush to come up with new ones. Fast forward to now, when the unfolding dynamics in the school have further nurtured KUNCI's ideas of dying. They have taught us about the need to continue our practice with care, although without knowing what could be gained or produced at the end of it. This is the antithesis of modern-colonial institutions' avoidance of dying at any cost. How to hospice something that just won't accept dying?

Annette

I recognize what you describe so well. I have had the opportunity to be a part (without being a team member) of certain life circles (e.g., the midscale art organization Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons in Utrecht) or long-term, self-organized collaborative practices, though in a European context. I witnessed precarious conditions, at the limits of physical and mental exhaustion brought on by an immense pressure to perform and by austerity measures, including endless and ever-shortening funding cycles. The desire and strenuous effort to survive is, I believe, also supported by the conviction of carving out a space, however small or entangled, that starts building other forms of working together against and within the neoliberal

(or late capitalist-colonial) system. The system is ruthless if you don't conform to the cost-versus-benefit market logic that is so directly opposed to the time-intensive activities we are involved in.

Ferdi, the way you connect decolonial work and hospicing brings up the question of a "good" death, for whom? And who avoids dying at any cost—can we unpack this also for bigger institutions in Europe?

I find it very difficult to find people, allies, who would allow for starting such a conversation about hospicing institutions. Is it too provocative? And don't get me wrong, this has nothing to do with any kind of accelerationist programs and their grand, patriarchal gestures. Some of the first reactions I would get when trying to initiate an (admittedly clumsy) conversation were: "So you want to abandon and kill the institution? Are you not afraid of losing your job?" Or the comment: "What a privileged discussion! I have a family to feed." And very often, the conversation would then be over.[6]

Hospicing is another kind of work, I believe. It is neither abandoning nor killing the institution. So my question is, how can I—myself a descendant of Western institutions—play a role in letting a system die that I am part of? And by "being part of," I mean not only that I am working within such an institution, but that these institutions are in me.

How can I push myself to see how I am implicated in that which is dying? It certainly frightens me; the scope is unimaginable. And yet, who benefits from not having this discussion? My hope is that I am brave enough (despite and because of the privileges that I inhabit) to practice "hospicing," in the words of Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures, because I don't really believe in a reform of this institutional system I am part of, nor do I believe in the possibility of exiting the system. For me, hospicing entails careful palliative attention, a care that needs to recognize that this dying structure is inhabited by and inhabiting many of us, so we cannot not wish for it to continue.

Part of this is then also hospicing a modern conception of the "self" that has molded itself to a merit-based, self-determined or self-directed learning that inhabits classrooms and school policy reports alike. The emphasis on the individual as a self-organizing, self-responsible, self-invested learner is presented as an end in itself, while at the same time it "pedagogizes" the individual into a form of capital. This constitutes an intricate web between the learning individual, labor, and capital, or, respectively, between education, enterprise society,

6 See also Stephen Small and Brianne McGonigle Leyh moderated by Quinsy Gario, "Black Lives Matter @ UU: Creating Change," livestream, Event Series #2, "The Role of Higher Education," November 30, 2020, www.youtu.be/m6AZiASPIR8.

and the growth model of the knowledge economy (Krauss 2018, 90–97).

Ferdi

Much of our work is aimed at going against the dominant model, which characterizes both learning and unlearning as individual processes. Instead, we aim at collective learning — for example, the cleaning together that you and the Casco team did as a part of unlearning exercises (*ibid.*). In these exercises, what does a collectivity of people have to offer that individualization does not? Also, how do you navigate the current status of "collectivity" as a buzzword in the art sector?

Annette

I am doubtful of this hype, and of its attention economy. We are talking about different timelines here. The hype surrounding collectivity (and unlearning) hardly addresses an art academy or art organization as a modern form of collectivity. The collectivity that constitutes an art academy/organization prescribes how a group of people come together with specific (internalized) rules, habits, and conventions. For me, unlearning and collectivity are tied together on both conceptual and personal-political levels.

On a conceptual level, I try to debunk the implicit individual attribution that un/learning seems to contain — as if it were up to an individual to (consciously or unconsciously) learn or unlearn. Instead, we (un) learn as bodies (plural). This also ties in with our introductory lines here, on what we mean by radical classroom practices. The "self" in self-determined learning under meritocratic, neoliberal rule is grounded in the individualization of learning and has little in common with the "self-determined learning" in the legacy of radical pedagogies. The latter thinkers and practitioners can only be understood in their radicality when they are thought of in conjunction with their inseparable quest for social equality and justice. Their "self" is always already a collective self. Thus, we need to ask what "conception of the self" (Wynter 1994, 45) is presupposed in self-determined learning and education, and who is excluded from it. The massive transformations that are happening in educational ideologies, policies, and funding in neoliberal times are nothing more than updated versions of modern-colonial capitalism.

On a personal-political level, engaging with unlearning is a practice concerning how to relate to each other, which certainly is not without contestation and conflict. Working collaboratively provides the possibility for allowing others to challenge the way I assume these relations too easily. This, in turn, might inform the way I engage with hierarchies, differences, and conflicts in these specific contexts. The cleaning together we engaged in was an attempt to put this into practice, as many others have done before.

To give some context: during the collaboration with the Casco team in *Site for*

Unlearning (Art Organisation), we helped ourselves with a guiding question: how can we unlearn the separation between the so-called back and front of an art institution? Such a separation is the default structure in most Western institutions. This question brings about a whole range of other questions. How does this separation impact our lives? How do we (not) sense and experience it? Why is one field hyper visible and another rather invisible and inaccessible? How does the organization cover up the latter field? How can we let these fields work in tandem? And who is the "we" that is addressed here? Which "we" steps up in which situation?

The collective cleaning exercise operated within this context and tried to access these nodes. It came into being in resonance and company with the other unlearning exercises, such as the ones concerned with property relations, collective authorship, off-balancing chairs, and digital cleaning, to name only a few (Allan et al. 2018).

Crucially, this work on unlearning would not be possible without postcolonial and decolonial scholarship and practices. "Unlearning one's privileges," as postcolonial feminist scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) put it in the 1980s, remains rigorous today. I translate her demands into "attending to" the spatiotemporal, embodied, material, and discursive relationalities of a specific situation in order to overcome social injustice. Decolonial scholarship (recently, the already-mentioned work by Vázquez Melken)[7] reminds us that next to the more or less well-examined circulation of power in the fields of capital, the nation-state, and gender, aesthetics is another field where power circulates. The arena of aesthetics regulates not only the way we represent the world but also how we experience our lives, our "selves"—the ways we sense, see, taste, and perceive the world, impacting how we relate to each other.

Against this background, for me unlearning involves "becoming aware," but it is not limited to rational approaches. It also attends to the affective, sensorial, and collective registers of the body, as well as to other nonrational approaches, faith, or fortune, including the overwhelming feeling of impossibility. Unlearning has a clear aim: namely, getting rid of my/our internalized, corporeal habits that perpetuate conditions of coloniality. In *Site for Unlearning (Art Organisation)*, we built on these considerations, with a specific focus on organizational process.

Here, unlearning practices might allow for small shifts that tackle internalized habits of thinking and doing, institutional routines, and deeply rooted colonial desires that determine how I perceive the world in a specific way. It is in this fracture

7 See also www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsdAzi-nj6U.

where unlearning introduces the possibility of letting the system that I am part of die, where the notion of hospicing links to unlearning.

Annette + Ferdi

Theories of change introduce a perspective or belief in how a situation can be modified, corrected, or enhanced. Social change and, even more so, theories about such change are context-specific, evolving in a specific place and, even more so, within and over time. Using this framework, let's go back to what the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures collective proposes. Aside from "hospicing," they discuss "hacking" as another decolonizing practice within an institutional setting of higher education. This approach requires one to "play the game" of the institution while trying to bend the rules toward other ends than "winning" (Ahenakew 2020, 53).

Annette

I find the hacking approach very compelling, and many of us with institutional positions aim to practice this kind of radical reform. While I believe in the necessity of hacking with regard to the redistribution of resources, I am not convinced of its efficacy when it comes to working toward a different institutional system altogether — the *beyond-reform*. Why? In their text, the collective gives a partial answer: I can never be sure whether I play the system or, in fact, the system plays me. Through hacking, there is a risk that I could make my everyday life a bit more bearable, and therefore actually sustain the system or institution that I set out to intervene in. By contrast, I see the vigor of hospicing in the way it involves my own colonial desires in order to let the system, and especially the system in me, die. Hacking leaves these (colonial) desires untouched, I believe.

Take the *Hidden Curriculum* (HC) project.[8] I set up this project as a collective study with secondary school students and teachers. Through it, we investigate in various ways what a hidden curriculum — that is, the things you learn alongside the official curriculum — could be and what it might do at a specific school. We look on a minuscule level at both the normalization processes and the subtle, or not-so-subtle, ways of subverting everyday life at the school. We develop approaches meant to help delimit our experiences of what is (not) possible. We study how the imagination is canceled in order to generate the subjectivities these institutions need in order to reinitiate the status quo. At its best, I think, the HC project works as a continuous practice of how not to accept one's environment, a system, as a given. This happens on the levels of both practice and the imagination. I still wonder where hacking, let alone hospicing, comes in. Looking at the HC project

8 See "Hidden Curriculum" from page 127 in this book and www.hidden-curriculum.info.

as an insertion into a specific social institution with the desire to disrupt hegemonic structures, there remains some ambivalence that we might be both subverting and perpetuating the existing system.

In the HC project I see yet another potential of hacking to corrode practices from within an institution, where individual dissatisfaction meets an overwhelming collective force against an institutional system. Imagine the gravity, if many unimportant practices could amount to an assurance that an institution does not have to be the way it is. Might a practice of hacking meet hospicing there?

Ferdi, I also connect the idea of hospicing to your work on both affect and listening. How would you frame this on the spectrum of existing practices within and against modern-colonial institutions?

Ferdi

Many of us continue to do what we are doing while being overwhelmed by the grief, hopelessness, and frustration of dealing with the ongoing violence of modern institutions. Routines such as collective listening and storytelling are invented both to enable efforts to "chip, chip, chip away the institutional walls," as Sara Ahmed has poetically described it (Ahmed in Fitzgerald 2017), and to become spaces to tend to the collective sores caused by continual friction against these walls. But more often than not, unfortunately, these moments reproduce some of the institutional violence that we seek to overcome, especially when the realities of individual suffering are turned into a means of establishing hierarchical differences (the discourse of "I am less or more privileged than you"), while neglecting once again our collective responsibility for addressing the structures that preserve this hierarchy.

When I listen to the stories of struggle that are shared in various gatherings and radical classroom settings, it becomes clear that the frustrations and exhaustions of dealing with the impossibilities you have mentioned are often projected onto each other — therefore individualizing — rather than being aimed against the structuring conditions. My knee-jerk reaction to this is to try to capture the swirling affects and wield them toward possibilities for a collective action. But, coming back to the image of the vortex, how much of this instinct is tied to the power to distance oneself from the entanglements that brought us together, and how much is at risk of recentering agency for individuals?

But as we have tried to simulate in this conversation, through vulnerable listening and storytelling, it is possible for people from differently grounded experiences, practices, and living-working conditions to speak on an eye-to-eye level. Differences can become the thresholds that allow us to connect with each other and, from there, to imagine a common ground that is refracted through situatedness and alterity. Thinking along with observations made

by Nira Yuval-Davis (1999) and Veronica Gago (2020), on transversal feminist works that have outmaneuvered the dichotomy between "us" and "them" as well as the establishment of boundaries between the self and the nonself in building political movements, I see this conversation in itself as a vortex in which two singular positionings mingle without necessarily merging, while at the same time pulling in various directions from their respective histories, contexts, and relationships.

It is in the spirit of transversely attending to one's own experience with others that listening and storytelling become powerful tools. They help me to stay within the realm of emergent yet suspended potential and to weigh how much we do what we do—why we keep on doing what we do, despite all the impossibilities—as a matter of endurance. Understood differently, rather than simply fulfilling a "will to survive," endurance takes the form of what Elizabeth Povinelli describes as an "ability to suffer and yet persist" (2011, 32). It pertains to practices of "keeping on going with," "staying with," "waiting out," "getting along with," and "withstanding" structural violence while forging collective responses to this damaging structure.

Annette + Ferdi

While the different practices we have elaborated thus far have done something toward letting modern-colonial institutions die, they have not done enough. Something else needs to be done, but at the same time this "something else" can only be realized through continually and collectively doing things differently from the ways they are currently being done.

Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)

Earlier parts of this essay are published in Bauer and Krauss 2013 and Krauss 2017, 63–77. The appearance of Zwarte Piet and its sociopolitical entanglements, which have, at the time of writing, slowly changed over the last five years (albeit only in larger cities), are a departure point for this research into unlearning. This contribution in the book does not give a comprehensive history of the Dutch Zwarte Piet controversies, but rather delineates the conditions of where and how to unlearn Zwarte Piet as a symptom of a much bigger discussion on systemic racism, to form a more robust practice of unlearning.

Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet) is an umbrella term for a collaborative artistic research project involving interventions, institutional work, debates, and texts since 2011. It profoundly builds on the project *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given* (2008–12) that began as a collaboration between Swedish artist Petra Bauer, Dutch cultural and activist groups Untold, and Doorbraak, and myself.[1] We came together in 2008 to investigate the Dutch phenomenon of Zwarte Piet (Black Piet) as a racist representation of blackness. The blackface figure who assists Sinterklaas is the patron saint of children and a key part of the annual Dutch gift-giving winter holiday. The aim of this work was to better understand the institutional structures in Dutch society that uphold this racist tradition, its entwinement with colonialism, and broader racist structures of which it is a symptom, and to explore how to contribute to re-opening this discussion. We studied the burgeoning—and abating—debates and protests against Zwarte Piet over the last 60 years, forms of resistance toward unlearning Zwarte Piet.

Read the Masks has oriented my work toward unlearning without framing it as such. Here, I continue to seek out where, when, and how I might unlearn Zwarte Piet in relation to institutional conflicts around Zwarte Piet. I look back at three bigger situations—first, the context of the Van Abbemuseum's *Be(com)ing Dutch* research and exhibition project in 2008 in which *Read the Masks* was developed, including installation/announcement (fig. 1) of a performance/protest march and debate (both 2008) and subsequent film (2009, fig. 2–4); second, the involvement of Utrecht higher education in the Zwarte Piet tradition; and third, a court case related to Zwarte Piet in 2013–14. Working through these cases and experiences, I consider how to write about and practice solidarity while being complicit in Western coloniality due to my heritage and work as an artist, and teacher at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht.

1 For detailed project acknowledgements see pages 53–54 in this text.

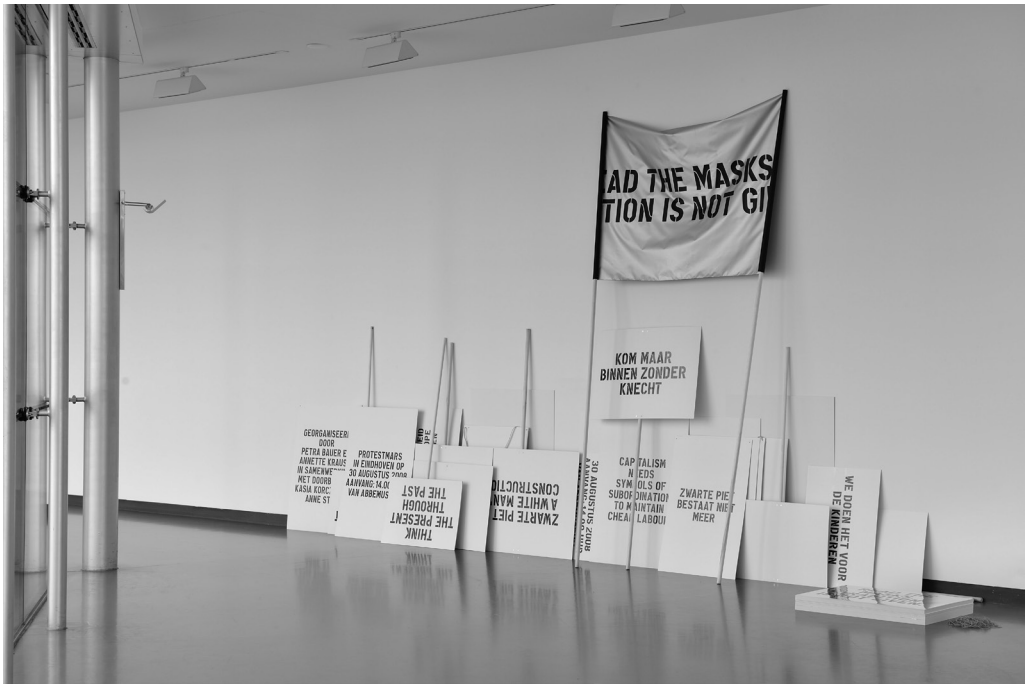

Fig. 1 Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss, *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given*, installation/announcement view, *Be(com)ing Dutch*, Van Abbemuseum, 2008. Photo: Peter Cox

Zwarte Piet

Zwarte Piet is part of the Sinterklaas tradition, celebrated in the Netherlands and Flanders from mid-November until December 5th when presents are exchanged, brought by Sinterklaas via steamboat from Spain. The figure Sinterklaas is similar to Saint Nicholas, whose name day is celebrated in other parts of Western Europe on December 6th. The subservient companions Zwarte Pieten (Black Petes) who accompany Sinterklaas have been until very recently, mostly enacted by white people in blackface, with curly-haired wigs, golden earrings, thickly painted red lips, colorful costumes, and imitating Surinamese or Moroccan accents (Wekker 2016, 140). The hierarchical relationship between the white Sinterklaas, a bishop atop his white horse, with his black helpers walking alongside and entertaining the crowd with supposedly funny, but also scary acts, is widely encouraged. Zwarte Piet

dolls, sweets, and images can be seen every year in store windows alongside brightly packaged holiday merchandise. Among its many descriptions, one of the earliest is in the children's book *Sint Nicolaas en zijn knecht* (Saint Nicholas and His Helper, c.1850). Amsterdam-based teacher Jan Schenkman offers a figure strikingly similar to the contemporary one and introduces the steamboat as part of the tradition. These depictions have had a storied impact on how people view blackfaced figures in the Netherlands. They extend to a wider position on racialization and what anthropologist Gloria Wekker calls "white innocence" of "Dutch self-representation" (Wekker 2016, 16–18) in considering these figures as welcoming and friendly, or, covered in soot.

The Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet tradition is not a marginal event enjoyed only by some groups, but rather one of the main societal and cultural events in the Netherlands that permeates many societal sectors (economy, schools, popular culture, and so forth). Back in 2008, a poll of several thousand people across the Netherlands taken by the Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage revealed the Sinterklaas tradition was the most "beloved tradition,"[2] followed by setting up the Christmas tree, and Queensday.

Since 2011 the position toward Zwarte Piet changed considerably in the broader public, initiated through ongoing protest by a broad alliance of antiracist groups and organizations in the Netherlands denouncing the racism of Zwarte Piet and irreversibly changing the landscape so that municipalities, schools, and shops have increasingly banned the figure. Nevertheless, as of 2022, one third of the Dutch population remained convinced that Zwarte Piet should not be changed, down from 50 percent in 2020, 61 percent in 2017, and 93 percent in 2011.[3]

Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given

Read the Masks consists of different elements and stages, involving an installation/announcement for a performance/protest march (2008, fig. 1), debate (2008), and a film (2009, fig. 2–4). It publicly started off in the framework

2 *Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau (ANP)*, "Pakjesavond traditie nummer 1," November 1, 2008.
3 See Milan Driessen and Asher van der Schelde, "Opnieuw meer Nederlanders voor verandering uiterlijk Piet," i&o research, December 2, 2022.

Fig. 2 Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss,
Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given, film still (choir), 2009

Fig. 3 Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss, *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given*, film still (Annie Fletcher, Glenn Codfried, and Sven Lütticken), 2009

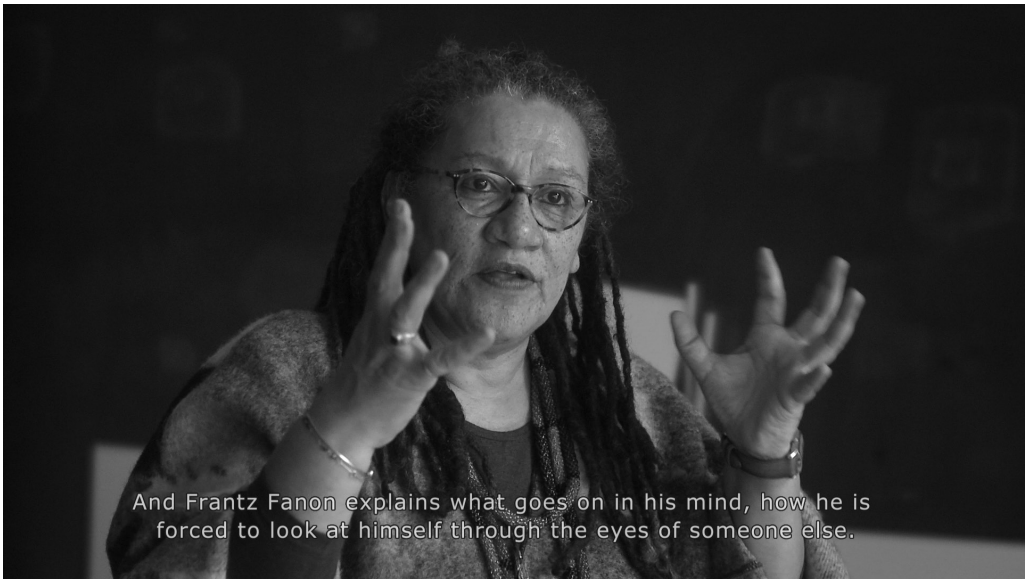

Fig. 4 Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss, *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given*, film still (Gloria Wekker), 2009

of the exhibition *Be(com)ing Dutch*, the final event of a two-year project on Dutch identity, nationality, citizenship, and social cohesion curated by director Charles Esche and curator Annie Fletcher at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, May 24 – September 14, 2008. For the *Be(com)ing Dutch* exhibition, the installation/announcement (see fig. 1) of placards and banners carried historical slogans from the last 60 years of protests against Zwarte Piet in the Netherlands. These had been used as book titles, film quotes, speeches, and more, and were ready for use in the upcoming march/performance on August 30, 2008, along the seasonal route of the November Sinterklaas parade in Eindhoven.

The festive speeches, spoken word performances, and other interventions by critical voices, aimed not only to mimic the yearly parade, but to counter it and resist through public acknowledgement. We wanted to stage and present the differing positions about the tradition in the streets of Eindhoven to re-open a discussion about these. A few days before, *Read the Masks* was picked up by many of the bigger newspapers and internet fora in the Netherlands. The articles and subsequent comments that emerged were often very critical of the project—many bluntly racist, some defending the tradition as it was, and some threatening violence against those involved and the museum. Due to these fierce reactions from the Dutch news, on social media, from politicians, and the more general public, the Van Abbemuseum felt compelled to cancel the performance/protest march, which once more triggered intense discussions around national identity and freedom of speech.

As a response, Bauer and myself together with the Van Abbemuseum and the Dutch art foundation Fonds BKVB organized a debate in autumn 2008 on Zwarte Piet and our project, titled *Zwarte Piet Of Niet? Kunnen We Er Over Praten?* (Zwarte Piet—Yes or No? Can we talk about it?). The debate took place at the Van Abbemuseum, was open to the public, and contributors included musician and producer Blaxtar, director Charles Esche, curator Annie Fletcher, researcher John Helsloot, moderator Chris Keulemans, researcher Jos Mangnus, TV personality Prem Radhakishun, artist Felix de Rooy, and ourselves. Reflections and discussions were shared on the role and impact of Zwarte Piet in Dutch society, xenophobia, and the relation between art and politics. Subsequently, together with many collaborators,[4] Petra Bauer and I made a film in response under the same title as the project, which would become the most visible part of *Read the Masks*.

It considers Zwarte Piet in a broader societal picture, the violent reactions toward protest against it, and institutional responsibilities including why the project could not leave the walls of the museum. The film features comments from stakeholders such as anthropologist Gloria Wekker who gives an account of Zwarte Piet deeply rooted in the so-called Dutch cultural archive,[5] and a symptom of white innocence, radio maker Glenn Codfried giving insights into resistance practices through Mart Radio program in De Bijlmer Amsterdam, Felix de Rooy talking about his work as filmmaker and specifically his experience in curating the exhibition *Zwart over Wit* at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in the 1980s. The film shows Annie Fletcher and Charles Esche discussing the heated events and media responses following *Read the Masks* in the context of *Be(com)ing Dutch* at the museum, and art critic Sven Lütticken reflecting on the cancellation of the project.[6] In the film, a choir recites a script based on press commentary, and the outcry in Dutch (social) media and politics about the project and its audacity to critique the racism of the figure of Zwarte Piet. More resistance strategies are exchanged that range from everyday individual actions such as boycotts and the refusal of Zwarte Piet in elementary schools, petitions, radio programs, street protests, etc. to a history of actions against Zwarte Piet written on a blackboard (see fig. 5). The film is freely accessible online,[7] directed toward those working on similar questions and building for future actions.

4 By then our close collaborators (Doorbraak and Untold) had taken a step back; they, however, committed to supporting the project by participating in certain events and as feedback partners.

5 Following Edward Said, Gloria Wekker describes the cultural archive as a "repository of memory" that "is located in many things, in the way we think, do things, and look at the world, in what we find (sexually) attractive, in how our affective and rational economies are organized and intertwined. Most important, it is between our ears and in our hearts and souls, [...] but its content is also silently cemented in policies, in organizational rules, in popular and sexual cultures, and in common sense everyday knowledge, and all of this is based on four hundred years of imperial rule" (Wekker 2016, 19).

6 Gloria Wekker made an in-depth analysis of the emails that we and the Van Abbemuseum received and dedicated a chapter to it in her book *White Innocence* (2016, 139–68). Sven Lütticken explored the project in relation to concepts of autonomy (2011); for the perspective of a curator of the Van Abbemuseum, see Ten Thije 2017.

7 See Bauer et al., *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given*, 2009, video, www.vimeo.com/53495267.

Call to Order: A Question of Unlearning

> What calls me to order?
> What calls my body to order?
> What calls my desires to order?
> What calls my obedience to order?
> What calls my agency to order?
> Who calls anyway?
> What calls?
> To which order?
> Why call?
> —(Baldauf et al. 2016, 85)[8]

The Van Abbemuseum's role within the project—its support for and actions against—occurred at various levels. Many staff members were critical about the project early on, making having conversations with those same members a necessary part of *Read the Masks*. We worked closely on this with curator Annie Fletcher, our contact person, who was supportive of the project and its inherent critique of Zwarte Piet. Yet the fierce reactions that saw the performance and protest march canceled were not the first time that the museum (or its staff) called us to order. Borrowing from Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013), "call to order" does not only refer to serious interventions, but also to restoring public order with regard to threats against the museum, its staff, its reputation, and economy, in addition to us and our collaborators. Moreover, "call to order" also comprises more subtle, yet no less effective, actions for restoring a status quo. In this instance, the museum yielded to violent, populist, and economic forces endorsed by a majority holding onto a white monolithic national culture; prime minister Mark Rutte in 2013 was still saying, "Zwarte Piet is nou eenmaal zwart, daar kan ik niets aan veranderen," meaning, effectively, that

8 The questions were generated in the context of the research project *Spaces of Commoning* at Academy of Fine Art Vienna during Vienna Art Week, November 17, 2015, and as a response to a public discussion that we organized with Stefano Harney around the notion and practice of study featured in Harney and Moten's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013).

Black Pete is black, and there's nothing that can be changed about that.[9] The museum was officially pilloried in parliament by right-wing populist Geert Wilders who urged depriving the Van Abbemuseum of city funding if they continued to support such a project; moreover, the museum lost quite a substantial number of "friends of the museum," who regularly supported them (also economically). "The complicity between cultural and economic value systems is acted out in almost every decision we make" (Spivak 1985, 83). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's claim in "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" is still relevant till today, and describes well what happened during this period. Spivak refers to the capacity of capitalism to capture culture and tie it to economic value; here, it is brought in direct proximity to racism and reveals the effects it has when all three aspects (culture, economy, racialization) are addressed in public. Historian Robin D.G. Kelley summarizes it aptly as follows: "the secret to capitalism's survival is racism" (2022). The decision to cancel this specific part of the project was taken unilaterally by director Charles Esche, who in the same meeting, articulated the museum's future commitment to the project, complicating the situation.

Alliances, however messy, are entangled with calls to order. These fragile relationships are time-based agreements that are built on difference, hierarchy, and power-based conversations. I have always considered the Van Abbemuseum a critical agent and ally who has shown commitment to the project despite or because of the calls to order and how they can be read as disciplinary, supportive, or protective (of staff) actions. Members from Untold and Doorbraak pointed out that we needed to take the momentum and continue as it was not about two artists whose project got canceled, as frequently portrayed in media, but about having critical voices against Zwarte Piet reach the news again after years of absence. In 2008/2009, no other museum in the Netherlands on the scale of the Van Abbemuseum

9 See statement by Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Zwarte Piet during a press conference on October 18, 2013, *NOS*, www.nos.nl/artikel/564038-rutte-piet-is-nou-eenmaal-zwart. For a more detailed discussion of Rutte's statement, see Van der Pijl and Goulordava 2014. In 2019, Rutte announced that the Zwarte Piet tradition needs to change, "Dutch PM Rutte sceptical about Black Pete tradition," *BBC*, June 5, 2020, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52937623. However, he was silent on the violence against people within the anti-Zwarte Piet action groups, see "Waarom praat u niet met Kick Out Zwarte Piet, premier Rutte?," *NRC*, November 22, 2019, www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/11/22/waarom-praat-u-niet-met-ons-premier-rutte-a3981324.

would commit to hosting an artistic project critical of Zwarte Piet. This is remarkable now given it seems that many stakeholders in the cultural world in the Netherlands can hardly imagine ever not having been against Zwarte Piet. One of the project's trajectories involved highlighting a long tradition of invisiblizing and silencing critique around the figure of Zwarte Piet. When it comes to museum culture, the exhibition *Wit over Zwart* curated by Felix de Rooy in 1989 in the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, constitutes one major exception to that. However, as De Rooy explains in the film, critique of Zwarte Piet also encountered severe calls to order. One example was the response to *Wit over Zwart* by Dutch Minister of Welfare, Health, and Culture Hedy d'Ancona, who, while visiting the exhibition, acknowledged the racism of displayed folklore objects, toys, and advertising widespread in the US and other European countries, but publicly rejected the claims that Zwarte Piet was racist, and accused De Rooy of blatant exaggeration.[10]

After the cancellation, the news peaked again. However, the discussion around racism and Zwarte Piet disappeared and shifted toward two (white) artists whose right for freedom of expression was denied. This change of debate was remarkable, and Gloria Wekker made us attentive to some of its nuances. White academia and people from the cultural scene had hardly commented on the media stir around our critique of Zwarte Piet, and now the comments, Wekker observed, were almost solely directed toward freedom of expression, pushing aside debates on racism again. Commentary on freedom of expression was linked to artists' rights to autonomy, which, separated from racism,[11] either rendered complaints of racism illegitimate, or assigned them to activist claims outside the museum's domain. This was also reflected in the media coverage of the conflict. Whereas the project's participation in disputes on racism appeared in the political sections of newspapers, the cancellation and discussions of freedom of expression appeared in the culture section.

Harney and Moten remind us that a call to order is not only executed in a reprimand handed down by a person in power for a particular activity according to particular rules, but needs to be considered in much more subtle

10 See Bauer et al., *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given*, video, 19 min 56 sec – 22 min.

11 These dynamics link tightly into the discussions on the impact of the deeply entrenched division between what is called "artist critique" and "social critique." See, for example, Krauss 2018, 74–92.

situations, however complex and powerful, like the simple gesture of starting a class and what this means for producing knowledge, and relationalities:[12]

> What I'm supposed to do is to call that class to order, which presupposes that there is no actual, already existing organization happening, that there's no study happening before I got there, that there was no study happening, no planning happening. I'm calling it to order, and then something can happen—then knowledge can be produced. That's the presumption (Harney and Moten 2013, 125).

The separation between claims for freedom of expression from those against racism was another more subtle call to order, as was the demand to decide whether *Read the Masks* was an art project or activism, residing as it did within the porous boundaries between protest march *and* artistic performance, artistic installation *and* announcement, cancellation *and* continuing. Harney and Moten speak to the difficulties of blurring deep-rooted boundaries that call us "into a certain kind of identity. [...] [I]n order to be recognizable, you have to answer the call to order—and ... the only genuine and authentic mode of living in the world is to be recognizable within the terms of order" (124–25).

For this book, a call to order, as a practice that reaffirms the institution in power on many also subtle levels, can be used to investigate the relationship between regulating processes of a museum like the Van Abbemuseum, public debates on art and activism, disciplinary mechanisms in secondary school classrooms (as outlined in the text in this book titled "Hidden Curriculum" on pages 127–65), and bodily incorporations of thinking and doing through which I call myself to order. Traditions (like the figure of Zwarte Piet) function particularly well in these inconspicuous calls to order by re-instantiating certain ways of living and perceiving through their quasi-naturalness (it has always been like that) and reaffirming implicit knowledges through yearly enactments on a private, public, institutional, bodily scale. A call to order has a grip on my body, on thinking and doing, enacted through institutional structures, bodily gestures, and discursive mechanisms. It is but one way to

12 I want to thank Simone Bader, Moira Hille, Marion Porten, and Ruth Sonderegger, for a particularly fruitful exchange; together we prepared and participated in a reading-translating-workshop on Harney and Moten's take on call to order in the framework of the twenty-year celebration of maiz (2014) in Linz, September 30, 2014.

understand how existent structures speak through my body. It is here that calls to order and everyday racism (Essed 1991) are closely interlinked.[13] Embracing both institutional racism and individual racism without separating them from each other, Essed describes institutional and individual racism as "different positions and relations through which racism operates" (1991, 36). Accordingly, individual and institutional calls to order are about different interpellations through which a specific order, status quo, or hegemonic regime is enacted and sustained. Being attentive to versatile calls to order in relation to everyday racism is instrumental in the study of institutional processes and their habits and how unlearning processes can take shape.

Project Acknowledgements

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Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given. Zwarte Piet Of Niet? Kunnen We Er Over Praten?, debate, organized by Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss, FondsBKVB, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, November 11, 2008. Panel included Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss, Charles Esche, John Helsloot, Chris Keulemans (moderation), Jos Mangnus, Prem Radhakishun, Kevin "Blaxtar" de Randamie, and Felix de Rooy. www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqowU6_MDCE.

Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given, video, 72 min, 2009, by Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss, Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, Utrecht, 2009 (premiere); Momentum Biennale, Norway, 2009; and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2011. www.vimeo.com/53495267.

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13 See "Afterword: Unlearning as a Scaffolding for Living" in this book on pages 225–39.

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For more on Petra Bauer, see www.f-a-m.group; Untold is a cultural organization aimed at addressing young people. Untold works with the history and the present situation of Black people in the Netherlands, www.untold.nl; Doorbraak is a radical-Left activist group that works against racism and neo-imperialism within Dutch society, www.doorbraak.eu.

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Zwarte Piet and Tertiary Education

Next to the site of the museum, Utrecht University also called to order in relation to Zwarte Piet, albeit in a different way than the Van Abbemuseum. They firmly held onto the tradition of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet, despite societal discussion and changes. Additionally, from 2013 until 2015, through several actions, meetings, and petitions (within the university),[14] a group of teachers, students, alumni, and associates at the university, including myself, urged Bert van de Zwaan in his capacity as Rector Magnificus at Utrecht University to refrain from the symbolic act of officially welcoming Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet during the yearly parade.[15] The start of the tradition is performed in an official, festive celebration with the mayor and the rector, in this case Van de Zwaan who, as a representative of one of the biggest universities in the Netherlands, endorsed this practice. The wide influence of this symbolic act was felt far beyond the university. In some of the many conversations I had with parents about Zwarte Piet, they defended Zwarte Piet by referring to the university's yearly participation in the tradition and their knowledge authority. Rector Van de Zwaan refused to abandon the university's participation in welcoming Zwarte Piet right up until his retirement in 2018, while city councils, schools, enterprises, and shops throughout the Netherlands refrained from endorsing the figure. The university did not publicly counter the figure, on the contrary, the rector's decision had been endorsed by many university teachers, staff, and students who sometimes rejected our claims, calling us to order by diminishing our forms of protest, in the form of public manifestations,[16] petitions, and open letters. There was some success, with Utrecht City Council refraining in 2020, meaning the Utrecht University would stop also (Hoving 2020). The accompanying discussions on white privilege, and unlearning within the university structure, have only slowly entered the university,[17] whose longstanding support of the Zwarte Piet tradition is but one example of how racism is perpetuated by Dutch tertiary education.

14 Petition to urge university to refrain from Zwarte Piet, *Kritische Studenten*, October 25, 2014.

15 I want to thank those with whom I could take on the actions, discussions, and interventions together. For names, see project acknowledgements on pages 53–54 in this publication. For more information on the actions, see also DUB (2014) and *Kritische Studenten* (2016).

16 See the anti-Zwarte Piet speeches during public manifestation on November 1, 2014, Utrecht.

Fig. 5 Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss, *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given*, installation view, blackboard, alternative history, *For Eindhoven*, Van Abbemuseum, 2011. Photo: Annette Krauss

Discussions also remain sensitive at the art academy HKU University of the Arts Utrecht, where I had worked at the time of writing as a teacher. From 2018 I participated in the BA Fine Art student-led initiative "Stop Black Face & Let Us Talk About It." Posters referencing Zwarte Piet at the academy were repeatedly ripped down and smeared with racist slurs. As a result, we initiated the student-teacher-led initiative Tools for the Times,[18] which challenges xenophobic institutional structures and everyday racism in art school. Still active through various working groups, the platform has found institutional support to discuss how the academy can become more sensitive toward diverse voices and act upon racist behavior. At the university and art academy, sites of struggle in which racist structures are deeply seated and upheld, unlearning cannot only be a practice of becoming aware, as importantly unlearning is about keeping the focus on and enduring the struggle with the aim of getting rid of racist structures.

Legacies of Protest Against Zwarte Piet

Right up until now, *Read the Masks* and *Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)* refuse attempts and calls to order that identify the projects as "unique" interruptions in the Zwarte Piet debate, to instead build on an ongoing temporality connected to past protests. The 2008 experience of lagging critical public discussion did not mean there was a lack of critical voices. Rather, these voices are ignored, ridiculed, or harshly shut down. The Zwarte Piet debate had been smoldering for decades, and since 2011 reached a public visibility and intensity through a series of impactful events including the violent arrest of artists Kno'lege Cesare (alias Jerry Afriyie) and Quinsy Gario, Siri Venning, and Steffi Weber for wearing T-shirts with the text "Zwarte Piet is racism" while silently attending the Sinterklaas parade in Dordrecht in November 2011. The anti-Black Pete campaigns of action groups such as Zwarte Piet

17 Claims have been more successfully launched within the University of Amsterdam. Student protests around the so-called Maagdenhuis occupation in 2015 resulted in the formation of a powerful group of students of color (university of color). Their demands to stop any active participation that relates to Zwarte Piet is but one of many claims for a more democratic and diverse university (Meulenbelt 2015).

18 See the Instagram account @toolsforthetimes, initiated by students Kiana Girigorie (who also started *Stop Black Face & Let Us Talk About It*), together with Megan Auður and Sarah McLacken.

is Racism,[19] Stop Blackface/Zwarte Piet Niet,[20] the Black Archives,[21] and Nederland Wordt Beter foundation,[22] include street protests, awareness projects, community work, negotiations with municipalities, schools, and other institutions. Since 2014, these initiatives joined forces in the group Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP), which began with organizing protests primarily in cities chosen for the annual start of the tradition. Since 2017 they have organized more than a dozen often simultaneous demonstrations and arranged for transport, security, and other logistics for people to participate elsewhere in the Netherlands. At the same time, KOZP and related groups have entered into dialogue with municipalities and companies and developed study material for schools and kindergartens. Their impact made it impossible to ignore the racism of Zwarte Piet any longer, and linked it to a broader discussion on racism in the Netherlands. Wekker introduced the term "second anti-racist movement" to describe these actions and protests since 2011 (2016, X).[23] In summer 2020, KOZP, Nederland Wordt Beter, the Black Archives,[24] and Black Queer & Trans Resistance, organized a huge protest of around ten thousand people in Amsterdam, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and in response to the killing of George Floyd by police on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis. Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic people showed their solidarity with victims of anti-Black racism and protested against racism in the US, the Netherlands, and more widely Europe. These action groups made their vision, actions, and demands explicit in the Zwarte Manifest,[25] which is a rich resource against racism across many sectors of society and yet another document that stipulates the inextricable relationships between the racist figure of Zwarte Piet and structural racism.

In 2007/2008 we took up the work of unlearning the dominant narrative that these protests allegedly did not exist. It is there, where I see an important part of the work of unlearning—the laborious work of searching

19 For a detailed timeline of important events since 2011, see *Nederland Wordt Beter*, www.nederlandwordtbeter.nl/tijdlijn.
20 See Stopblackface, www.stopblackface.com.
21 See the Black Archives, www.theblackarchives.nl.
22 See *Nederland Wordt Beter*.
23 For "first anti-racist movement," see "Begrippenlijst," Zwart Manifest.
24 See the Black Archives.
25 See "Begrippenlijst," Zwart Manifest.

and referencing previous actions, despite, or even because of, the dominant narrative that jumps to the ill-informed conclusion that people had been just fine with Zwarte Piet.[26] This referencing-as-resistance asks for a different form of attention economy, which resists art's appetite for innovation and spectacular new beginnings. At the same time it works against an allegedly rational argument of white superiority fed by white innocence.

Through the evolving network of people, we were brought into contact with stories, notes, documentation, and everyday practices against Zwarte Piet, amounting to street protests, (academic) writings, films, performances, and printed matter. For example, Rahina Hassankhan's publication *Zwarte Piet: Al is hij zo zwart als roet* (1988) and Lulu Helder and Scotty Gravenberch's campaign "Zwarte Piet = Zwart Verdriet" (1994–97) with the resulting edited volume *Sinterklaasje, kom maar binnen zonder knecht* (Sinterklaas, come in without your servant, 1999) that includes texts amongst others by Teun van Dijk, Philomena Essed, Anil Ramdas, and Astrid Roemer, have provided more examples for protest, discursive frameworks, and historical research. Some of the interlocutors refer to everyday acts of resistance that include speaking to parents in schools about the racial stereotyping of Zwarte Piet, going to teachers, headmasters, and school boards, addressing people in neighborhoods, or friends. Scholar and activist Patricia Schor points out that these practices are very often met with retort: grim rejection, ridicule, or abandonment. It takes courage to engage in these encounters, though they are very often not regarded as being on the same level as publicly voiced resistance (Schor 2013).

Wekker and Schor have pointed to the "gendered division of labor in the protest against Zwarte Piet." While public attention has predominantly centered around mostly Black[27] men, everyday protest at schools is taken up by mostly Black women (Wekker 2016, 157). After 2011, media coverage

26 The meticulous work of referencing has also been part of discussions with Quinsy Gario during *Read the Masks* (see also Suransky and Jouwe 2015). In this conversation Gario refers to many historical protests against Zwarte Piet (see also OneWorld 2019).

27 I write Black in title case following a discourse that proposes a capitalization to denote and support the political term Black and Person of Color that exceeds provenance and appearance. The usage of these terms relates to persons that do not identify as white, and do not exclusively relate to European-Western-Christian cultures and their traditions and ideologies (see Amoo-Adare 2014, 8; Kazeem and Schaffer 2012, 177).

of spokespeople in the protests against Zwarte Piet no longer only involve men. Research by cultural historian Nancy Jouwe insistently highlights the work of Black, Migrant, and Refugee women in the Netherlands now and then. The composite term Black, Migrant, & Refugee Women's Movement refers to the work of "Dutch Black feminists and feminists of colour and position them as the Dutch intellectuals, organisers, and activists who, as a movement and as individuals, have been the key to developing an intersectional theory and praxis" (Jouwe 2016, 3). In 2008, for Bauer and myself, the gendered division of labor and visibility made us more cautious toward the protagonists and their contributions in the subsequent film.

Quite early on in *Read the Masks* we agreed that our engagement would also consist of collaboratively developing an alternative history of protest against Zwarte Piet, drawing on individual memory, revisiting personal archives, and some scholarly articles. The resulting list of alternative protest history became an unfolding archive of counter-practices over the past 60 years. In the museum, the alternative history of critical voices took form as a fragmented list written with chalk or marker on black and white boards in different settings. These boards have been indicators for placing where we wished it to be, in institutions such as schools and universities, entering classrooms as much as the administrational-managerial levels. These are places that time and again fail to be sites where students and staff can un/learn and engage in antiracism.

Next to the wide-ranging activities of protest that the list documents in form and scale, the protest references reappeared on the banners and placards installed during *Be(com)ing Dutch* (see fig. 1). They were ready to be taken up for the (later canceled) performance and protest march and used in the film. They reappeared sporadically throughout protests since 2011. *Read the Masks* does not use any rhetoric of "new," but the fragile "ongoing," tying in the legacy of protests against Zwarte Piet. The attempt is to intervene in the (modernist) understanding of art that invokes the spectacle of the new and the idea of innovation through aesthetic and creative processes. The work of contextualizing and referencing those on whose shoulders one is standing is till today often met with discomfort or shrugging shoulders. By problematizing the "new," especially in relation to a historical temporality of progress, my question is: how can we know what counts as new or the beginning (or end) of a historical development? To answer such a question the

work by philosopher Amy Allen (2016) is useful in distinguishing problems around historical progress as conceptual and political challenges. From a conceptual perspective, identifying what counts as new, or as a development can hardly be done without claiming a superior position of knowing how to measure this development and where to start. Allen frames the political challenge toward the idea of progress by referring to postcolonial, decolonial, and anticolonial critiques.[28] These critiques debunk the idea that European modernity is the outcome of historical progress as accumulative learning, which in turn is implicated in an imperialistic logic legitimizing colonization. Putting progress in a nutshell, decolonial scholar Anibal Quijano characterizes it as a foundational myth of Europe:

> All non-Europeans could be considered as pre-European and at the same time displaced on a certain historical chain from the primitive to the civilized, from the irrational to the rational, from the traditional to the modern, from the magic-mythic to the scientific. In other words, from the non-European/pre-European to something that in time will be Europeanized or modernized. Without considering the whole experience of colonialism and coloniality, this intellectual trademark, as well as the long-lasting global hegemony of Eurocentrism, would hardly be explicable (Quijano 2000, 556).

At the core of the acquisition-model of learning is a developmental individual understanding that supports the idea of progression and maturity in the sense of a movement from immaturity to maturity, which creates a hierarchy between the two. This form of learning progress is deeply entrenched with the colonial civilizing mission of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that inscribes institutional processes, Western ways of thinking and doing. It haunts Western investigations, aesthetic, educational, and theoretical conventions and our subjectivities. It is modernity's inscribed call to order, its aesthetic regime that plays out not the least in a particular temporality that materializes in modernity's obsession with the new. I follow here also Rolando Vázquez Melken's decolonial paths in *Vistas of Modernity* (2020); he describes modernity as a system of aesthetic

28 For my use of the terms anticolonial, decolonial, and postcolonial, see footnote 2 in "Introduction and Acknowledgements: Practicing Unlearning" on page 12 in this book.

order that not only works along a certain regime of representation, but as importantly through a regime of experience. How we experience our lives and environments in Western contexts is fed by a temporal undercurrent that directs us through many subtle movements (or calls to order) toward the now and away from precedence (Vázquez Melken 2020, 57–62). Vázquez Melken calls for decolonial aesthesis, which he differentiates from modern aesthetics as "the plurality of sensorial experiences and expressions that are in excess of the modern order of aesthetics" (2019, 1). The modern-colonial regime of experiences only allows for certain experiences and expressions to emerge. These experiences are arrested as certain routines of thinking and doing, which thus determine what one experiences as allegedly possible and impossible. The attention of this publication is directed toward unlearning these routines of the impossible toward a plurality of sensorial experiences that make other worlds possible.

How does this relate to the central topic of this text? The fragile continuation of an always already existing legacy of protest against Zwarte Piet activates unlearning through micro-interventions that problematize and fracture the dominant temporality of the new and progress entangled with historical learning processes. Moreover, it is an attempt to share on whose shoulders I stand and acknowledge those who came before us.

Solidarity

From 2013 to 2015, a court case around Zwarte Piet took place amidst ongoing heated public debates. As I was not directly involved, I can only approach it through the court documentation, media reports, and scholarly texts to discuss the ruling, with my particular interest in questions of solidarity and connections across subject positions.

With the growing number of public actions by anti-Zwarte Piet groups after 2011, a few municipalities started to have closed-door meetings with opposing parties to discuss change. In the meantime, the NGO Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage (VIE) was in the process of including the Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet tradition in the Dutch Inventory of Intangible Heritage.[29] The listing as national cultural heritage was a prerequisite for the admission into the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list,[30] when

presenting the Sinterklaas tradition to the UNESCO in November 2012 (Rodenberg and Wagenaar 2016, 216–19). This process did not go unnoticed, and chairwoman of the National Platform for Slavery History Barry Biekman, together with an alliance of Dutch Black organizations, wrote letters to the UN Commission for Human Rights, and the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage section about the racist stereotyping of Zwarte Piet and the impending admission of the Sinterklaas tradition including Zwarte Piet.[31] In fall 2013, in response, and prior to a visit to the Netherlands, Verene Shepherd, head of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent,[32] established in 2002 to study racial discrimination and make proposals for its elimination, stated: "the UN working group cannot understand why people in the Netherlands do not see this is a throwback to slavery, and that in the 21st century this practice should stop" (Balkenhol, Mepschen, and Duyvendak 2016, 3). While the majority of Dutch politicians tried to ignore the comments, the application for the national and international list for the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list proved unsuccessful in 2013. However, a Facebook site called Pietitie (alluding to the Dutch word *petitie* for petition) was initiated in support of the Zwarte Piet tradition, and within a few days this petition received more than 2.2 million likes, equaling 13 percent of the Dutch population. A renewed application for registering the Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet tradition in the national inventory was successful in 2015.[33]

29 See Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau (ANP), "Pakjesavond traditie nummer 1," 2008 and Strouken 2010.

30 As consequence of the ratification of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Dutch parliament in 2012, the Dutch government has made the NGO VIE "responsible for the safeguarding of intangible heritage, for the National Inventory list, and for nominating immaterial heritage to the UNESCO Representative List" (Rodenberg and Wagenaar 2016, 718).

31 See "UN encourage respectful national debate on Dutch tradition" (2013) and "Letter from UNESCO" (2013). The complaint stated that "the character and image of Black Pete perpetuates a stereotyped image of African people and people of African descent as second-class citizens, fostering an underlying sense of inferiority within Dutch society and stirring racial differences as well as racism" (quoted in Balkenhol, Mepschen, and Duyvendak 2016, 3).

32 See the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (no date).

33 Dutch Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2015. While the registration of the tradition in the national inventory enshrines the tradition and therefore also the racist character of Zwarte Piet, the list entry also describes the tradition as dynamic and therefore up to change in the future in relation to public controversies. There has not been a successful application on an international level to the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List up until today.

During the same period, a court case over Zwarte Piet was held for the first time in the Netherlands in reaction to the dismissal by Mayor of Amsterdam Eberhard van der Laan of a notice of appeal against the presence of Zwarte Piet in the yearly Amsterdam parade. The mayor granted permission and subsequently a group of plaintiffs filed their complaint at an administrative court in Amsterdam on the grounds that Zwarte Piet, as a negative stereotype of Black people, infringes on people's private and family lives (Martina 2014). In July 2014, the administrative court ruled that the mayor had disregarded the feelings of Black people and needed to reconsider the presence of Zwarte Piet. This was seen as a big success among the anti-Zwarte Piet groups. However, it was a temporary success. The case was brought to court again, this time by the mayor, at the highest level of the administrative court, de Raad van State (Council of State), which overruled the plea of the plaintiffs and supported the mayor's decision to allow for the presence of Zwarte Piet with a defense of maintaining public order and safety (Wekker 2016, 145).

In the case two aspects are striking with regard to how these congeal certain relationships within the group of plaintiffs. First, the Amsterdam ruling is based on Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights, acknowledging an "infringement of the right to respect private life, [...] since the figure of Zwarte Piet is a negative stereotype of Black people."[34] Both Alejandro Martina (2014) and Wekker (2016, 145–46) interpret this decision as implicitly assigning the racism related to Zwarte Piet to the private realm and by "treating racist oppression as feelings of hurt, avoids addressing it as a structural problem" (Martina 2014). While the appeal to Article 8 itself might narrow the claim of the plaintiffs to the private realm, as far as I know, within existing legal frameworks there are hardly any alternatives to address public dissemination of racist stereotyping at a structural level. Second, the Raad van State court corroborated their own ruling by weakening the group's appeal on the grounds that "the rights [...] of white plaintiffs are not infringed, because they are not personally affected by negative stereotyping,"[35] and therefore

34 Court of Amsterdam, 03-07-2014. ECLI:NL:RBAMS:2014:3888. Texts can be found at www.rechtspraak.nl. My translations.

35 Raad van State, 12-11-2014. ECLI:NL:RVS:2014:4117. Texts can be found at www.raadvanstate.nl. My translations.

cannot make an appeal to Article 8. The court did not only separate the group, but also differentiated Black from white plaintiffs, categorizing who belongs to one group or the other and exercising power to define on these terms. Equally important, the ruling designated white people as unaffected by racism, which denies their implicatedness in acts of racism. The roles in the appeal are firmly distributed: "White plaintiffs came to the defense of the Black plaintiffs" (Martina, 2014). Wekker highlights the "politics of compassion"[36] as the mobilization of a particular emotional relationship between people in solidarity that simmers beneath this court's decision. The ruling reinscribes a century-long relationship between white and black people, by re-establishing "whites as rescuers and savior of blacks" (Wekker 2016, 146) and propagating a long tradition of imperialism. To summarize, if we regard solidarity broadly as an agreement between and support for the members of a group (for a specific cause), the court's ruling presupposes (or calls to order) a certain form of solidarity. Namely, it edges the white plaintiffs out into a one-dimensional form of compassion and reduces solidarity to a hierarchical relationship between those who suffer and those who watch.

The Politics of Solidarity: Between Affective Disposition and Political Organization

When we worked on *Read the Masks*, I was frequently asked about my motivation to engage in such a practice. Why would I be interested in intervening and taking sides in discussions around Zwarte Piet, the history of slavery, and its repercussions? In advance of any response from me, two different yet related answers were repeatedly offered to me by the interlocutors. The first were feelings of guilt I must have as a German, given the atrocities of the Nazi regime. While I do not regard myself guilty of crimes Germans committed during the Nazi regime, I take the responsibility in light of those crimes in the sense that I must be "responsive" to it—a form of responsibility connected to the past of specific societies of which one is a member. In a similar way with Zwarte Piet, these forms of responsibility summon European histories of slavery and produce what Michael Rothberg calls "implicated subjects" (2019).

36 In reference to the notion of "politics of compassion" developed by Balkenhol (2014).

This implicatedness surmounts a supposedly finished past, and is imbricated in the present with its haunting representations, socio-economic benefits, and discursive underpinnings. Second, some interlocutors suggested my engagement had to do with my child who they assumed was of color. This assumption was spurred by my descriptions of how I learned of the enthusiastic anticipation of Zwarte Piet from my child who attended primary school in the Netherlands where the stories are interwoven with an elaborate daily month-long curriculum.

My motivations to engage in *Read the Masks* have been many, but an important one has certainly been my quest for antiracist practices of solidarity that are less structured by axes of domination. I am indebted to anticolonial struggles and their insistence on practice, that stress "a critical force of opposition, which struggles against a colonialism that persists" (Hiraide 2021). Anticolonial work of coalition building and allyship that places the urgency of resistance as collaborative action has been important for saying no to Zwarte Piet, and starting a process of unlearning the effects of Black Pete's presence. Furthermore, being indebted to decolonial practices and scholarship, I am searching for forms of solidarity inspired by what Vázquez Melken and Arturo Escobar describe in a conversation as "practices that enable multiple pasts and futures" (2020).[37] Instead, the forms of solidarity that I have encountered or practiced struck me as often faulty ones, as they provoke competing memories and pasts, or do not live up to the complexities of our worlds. The suggested explanations of my seeming motivation, together with the court's ruling are related to my investigation into other forms of solidarity, because they present expectations of who—and under what conditions—is related to certain events and subsequently how they are supposed to be practiced. They are built upon specific ideas of being affected (or not) or being implicated (or not), and as Rothberg demonstrates categorize people reductively as victims, perpetrators, or passive bystanders (2019, 1–31). However, being implicated is much more complex. In a conversation with postcolonial scholar

37 Enabling multiple pasts strongly resonates also with Michael Rothberg's conceptualization of "multidirectional memories" (2009) that become meaningful when different histories of extreme violence confront and compete with each other. Instead, he puts Holocaust Studies in dialogue with Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies, relating memories of the Holocaust to memories of slavery and colonization, but not equating them.

Paul Gilroy, novelist and cultural critic Toni Morrison incisively points to such a complex and affective implication:

> Slavery broke the world in half, it broke it in every way. It broke Europe. It made them into something else, it made them slave masters, it made them crazy. You can't do that for hundreds of years and it not take a toll. They had to dehumanize, not just the slaves but themselves. They have had to reconstruct everything in order to make that system appear true (Morrison 1993, 178).

What are these systems and reconstructions of "truths" that still uphold the aftermaths of colonialism up until today in Europe? I am, as a white person, included in this history of colonialism, the colonial past of the continent—its society and culture—in which I live and of which I partake. It affects my position, my psyche, and how I am positioned and implicated in this world. I don't read Morrison's quote as an indictment of guilt. Rather, it pertains to what anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes as a,

> historical responsibility [that] cannot hark back to an original sin that the collective-individual supposedly committed. Rather, it needs to take into account the structures of privilege unleashed by a history of power and domination and to evaluate the current losses induced by the reproduction of these structures (2000, 183).

Trouillot and Morrison speak to the implicatedness in injustice without directly executing harm in the common sense of a perpetrator. Rather, one is implicated because one benefits from historical and present-day injustices. Trouillot does not speak of privileges and responsibilities in an individual manner (although being executed by individuals), but ties them to a history of power and domination in which many have been involved. Morrison complexifies implication even more by pointing toward the systems of truth that we—as European subjects—have inherited, that still inhabit and affect us till today. The court ruling enacts such a truth system and issues a particular relationship between Black and white people by making a critical differentiation between those who are affected by a racist act (and suffer from it) and those who are not. A corresponding differentiation was suggested to me: under which condition would I be able to engage in protest against Zwarte Piet, its dimensions, and motivations?

To put it in other words, the court's designation of white people as

unaffected by racism is a fierce twist that denies being implicated in acts of racism (besides perpetration). I suspect the speculations about my reasons for being engaged in *Read the Masks* share these assumptions. Instead, Morrison writes in the aforementioned text what is at stake: "They [i.e., us, Europeans] had to dehumanize, not just the slaves but themselves," the forces of dehumanizing in acts of racism go both ways, yet in different registers and truth claims. To paraphrase Morrison, acts of racism still make us—white people—crazy today.

As I write this my discomfort increases. How can I prevent confusing processes of dehumanizing with victimizing people and comforting white tears? I attempt to do this by accessing varied registers and truth claims, and investigating where the "modern-colonial matrix of power"[38] is at play and calls to order in the denial of white people's implication in acts of racism (in both ways). The court's ruling is pertinent; it fixes people in one-dimensional positions and reduces their ways of relating, where white people are "unaffected by racism except, perhaps by pity and compassion, which then moves them to perform acts of charity towards Black people" (Martina 2014). With cultural critic Lauren Berlant and anticolonial scholar Frantz Fanon, I connect these observations to a bigger scale. The history of those who pity assumes a passivity on the side of the distressed and renders the spectator an "ameliorative actor" wherein European nations and institutions perform a relationship of "ameliorative care" (Berlant 2004, 2–15). Fanon pointed to this early on when he wrote that the continuation of conditions of coloniality after the official end of colonialism has been instituted by European nations through seemingly "unselfish programs of aid and assistance" (1961, 206). These forms of coloniality are still ongoing and translated into structural programs of "development aid" such that pity as compassion in Western societies is inextricably entangled with often rehearsed articulations of the "not yet civilized" or "underdeveloped," as I problematize with Quijano

38 The term modern-colonial stems from decolonial theory (Quijano 2000) and describes colonialism as constitutive of modernity and vice versa. Hence, this perspective sees modernity as not solely emerging from European history, but takes into account the concept of coloniality, which refers to the modes of control of social life and economic and political organization that emerged in colonies in the Americas, Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia from the beginning of the sixteenth century that become worldwide in their influences as outcomes of colonialism, slavery, and emerging capitalism (Gilroy 1993; Mbembe 2014; Quijano 2000).

before. Postcolonial scholar Ann Stoler succinctly shows that this self-image of compassion did not emerge despite slavery, but through it (Stoler 2004). Unlearning here refers to Stoler's project of redirecting our self-image of benevolent aid to instead confront our complicity with and implicatedness in the modern-colonial project. As I have tried to indicate, the implicatedness in racism is much more complex, the stakes for unlearning much more intense. The call to order to a certain form of solidarity (and compassion) that was exercised through the court's ruling had a ripple effect, and has re-instantiated long-existing colonial relationalities between people.

Solidarity: Commitment Toward Difference, Incommensurability, and Affect

The politics of solidarity located in the tensions between affective formations, solidarity concepts, and political organization are always already situated in an embodied reality with fluctuating intensification, and mobilizations. Complex ways of implicatedness and structural responsibilities co-constitute practices of solidarity as much as the politics of compassion, and we cannot simply do away with feelings and emotions. Instead, Paul Gilroy claims that compassion forms a political field in which there is "potential for political action and pedagogy" (2009, 46). Against this backdrop I analyze the relationalities within specific forms of solidarity. Earlier in this text, I have considered the court ruling, and my own involvement in and against racism, and now, I focus on critical approaches to solidarity instrumental to my thinking—to further understand their inherent modes of oppression and contribute to more robust practices of unlearning.

Can solidarity and compassion move away from affective dispositions of guilt and pity to support forms of political organization that favor implicatedness and structural responsibilities? How can the increasing emphasis on affective dispositions in Western societies, and their impact on concepts of solidarity, be understood? Decolonial, indigenous education scholars Rubén Gaztambide-Fernandez, Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang are skeptical of solidarity; Tuck and Yang criticize it as "an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict" (2012, 3). They attempt to scrutinize the impositions made by forms

of solidarity and—in reference to cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter—lay bare presupposed concepts of humanity and cultural difference (Wynter 1994 & 2003). Gaztambide-Fernandez identifies three aspects crucial to solidarity concepts: first, the inherent relational character among individuals or groups; second, the forms of obligation that feed relationships or commitments to come together for political action; and third, actions or duties between those in a relationship of solidarity (2012, 8–10). What is crucial for Gaztambide-Fernandez is the commitment to imagining and practicing difference instead of working along similarities as a "pedagogy of solidarity." Solidarity concepts very often depend on similarities in characteristics, political interests, social needs, or moral obligations. What is more important for Gaztambide-Fernandez, "yet more rare and complicated to theorize, is a conception of solidarity that hinges on radical differences and that insists on relationships of incommensurable interdependency" (2012, 46). Tuck and Yang offer a complementary view, that attempts at solidarity in the work of decolonization necessarily "unsettle innocence and recognize incommensurability" (2012, 4). According to Gaztambide-Fernandez, all three aspects of solidarity (relational, commitments to coming together, duties between the solidary members) need to be investigated through their understanding of difference. However, it is not just any difference that matters. By developing a genealogy of solidarity concepts for education committed to decolonization, he urges the investigation of the arrangements that impose differences through the colonial project of modernity. He focuses on the impact of multicultural projects and their concepts of difference. Multicultural projects have been criticized by postcolonial and decolonial scholarship for their essentialist views on culture with an authentic fixed origin that is unrelated to other cultures that therefore are assigned differently (Hall 1992; Andreotti 2007). Instead, Gaztambide-Fernandez suggests, in reference to philosopher Judith Butler, to recenter "difference through a focus on the particularities of human interdependency rather than the generalities of human universality" (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2012, 44). These interdependencies co-constitute how we relate to each other. Thinking difference through relationalities allows for the imagining of what implicatedness can mean and do.

The dedication to difference, relationalities, and implicatedness is what links Gaztambide-Fernandez's view on solidarity concepts to Spivak's "unlearning one's privileges" (see "Instead of Solving Paradoxes and Contradictions"

on pages 95–121 in this book). Through their inexorable context-specificities neither can decide beforehand what claims are relevant to a given situation since they depend on the particularities and complexities of local desires and needs. Bringing difference, relationalities, context-specificity, and implicatedness together has the potential to direct the attention to (socio-economic) inequities and privileges that are obscured and neglected by present conditions of coloniality.

The question of how to account for the increasing emphasis on affective dispositions in Western societies and their impact on the concept of solidarity remains. Gaztambide-Fernandez situates the role of affect within concepts of solidarity in the tension between refraining from rationalist demarcations (2012, 45)[39] and steering away from conflating solidarity with empathy (46).

But where do we go from here? As Berlant has intriguingly emphasized, "affective formations," such as feelings (of hurt) and pity co-constitute the neoliberal condition in late capitalism. She argues that forms of solidarity that used to be implemented in welfare state organizations as structural responsibilities of the state, are now directed toward the individual (Berlant 2004, 2–6). Consequently, it has become much harder to base claims of solidarity on structural inequities be they legal, civic, or economic. Instead, solidarity circulates as, and is reduced to individual obligations fed by personal emotions. This doesn't mean that the state vanishes as such, but rather, as Berlant further argues, manages a shift within the character of obligations; affective formations become the heart of accompanying state policies. These state

39 An example of such a position is Hannah Arendt's view on solidarity. Being suspicious of sentiment, she separates personal emotions from the political domain, arguing that "politics based on personal feeling becomes corrupted" (quoted in Canovan 1992, 197). Instead, she pleads for a politics guided by principles, which need to be distinguished from personal morality (based on emotions). Arendt therefore differentiates between pity as the "perversion of compassion" and solidarity, which is directed "not at merely alleviating the suffering of the oppressed, but at more fundamental and systemic change" (2006, 78–79). However, the introduction of Arendt is not without questions, especially regarding her dubious relationship to race politics in the US at that time, as it became apparent in her extremely negative comments on the black student movement in the US (1969, 44). Arendt's conviction to keep emotions, feelings, and desires out of the public political sphere is contested. She crystallizes solidarity as a thoroughly rational concept and introduces a seemingly clearcut separation between an embodied reality with needs and desires and a political public sphere that is thoroughly rational (see also Allen 1999).

40 "Attendant [state] policies relocate the template of justice from the collective condition of specific populations to that of the individual, whose economic sovereignty the state vows to protect" (Berlant 2004, 9).

policies put center stage individual "economic sovereignty" (2004, 9) while at the same time unhinging structural responsibilities.[40]

How is this all connected to the leading concepts unlearning, call to order, solidarity? Keeping structural responsibilities in place where they still exist, excavate, and re-establish them when they got lost, is something to fight for when it comes to solidarity amid the excess of affective dispositions in late capitalism. We cannot do this alone, but need to do this together. When groups (in solidarity) step into this void, Berlant urges us to be aware of the affective individualizing tendencies that call groups to order—in the end, the Zwarte Piet court ruling focused on the individual—and Gaztambide-Fernandez provides handles for a pedagogy of solidarity committed to non-dominant difference when building coalitions and collective actions.

Practicing Unlearning in Five Ways

Unlearning a Call to Order

In this text, call to order functions as a lens to study practices that reaffirm the institutions (i.e., also habits) in power. A call to order does not only refer to serious interventions by people, institutions, or other entities having authority and/or power, but also to inconspicuous practices that re-instantiate certain ways of living and perceiving through their quasi-naturalness and reaffirming implicit knowledges through recurring enactments on a private, public, institutional, bodily scale. A call to order has a grip on my body, on thinking and doing, enacted through institutional structures, bodily gestures, and discursive mechanisms. The phenomenon of Zwarte Piet and its racism are pushed into acceptance through many calls to order on different levels. In this vein, unlearning calls to order unsettles the very processes through which social forces and formations push me/us to accept a certain approach to the world, and starts a collective process of renegotiation.

Unlearning Dominant Forms of Temporality

The authority of a call to order is also performed through a certain temporality, wherein power lies in, for example, a start: in the subtle gesture of starting a meeting, or the less subtle claim of the beginning of a historical period, and the drive toward the new. Questioning taken-for-granted understandings of

time is dealt with in *Read the Masks. Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)* builds on this and explores the role of time that surfaces in a historical understanding of progress, which depends on a certain development over time. The label of "(under)developed" and the accompanying superiority and inferiority that perpetuate conditions of coloniality, in the form of structural programs of "development aid," are part and parcel of this. Unlearning these relationships built on developmental understandings (or underdevelopment) is a demand in sites for unlearning.

Unlearning Individualized Responsibilities Toward Structural Ones

Structural responsibilities with regard to legal, civic, and economic inequities were obligations of the state or other collective entities in Western societies during the twentieth century. In late capitalism, obligations tend to be shifted by state policies and corporate privatization to individual responsibilities. These agents forcefully deny acknowledging the accumulated privileges through histories of domination. Nevertheless, these privileges perform certain relationships between people, objects, concepts, and practices in specific contexts. They are not to be confused with those affective formations that result from the denial of privileges, emphasizing individual responsibility such as guilt or pity. Instead, state and corporate measures call the individual to order to take on the burden to realize one's individual responsibility accompanied by affective interpellations and personal emotions. The sites for unlearning work on and fight for structural responsibilities while being aware of one's own implicatedness in oppressive structures, and what this means and does for practices of solidarity, coalition building, and collective action.

Unlearning the Separation of Factual Violence and Fictional Character

Practicing alliances and engaging in solidarity need to attend to the complications around structural and individual responsibilities. Carefully excavating both the differences *and* responsibilities in these specific relationships (solidarity and coalition) might help to unpack aspects of the "coloniality of power" (Quijano 2000). Moreover, approaching processes of unlearning demands a rigorous turn to the implicatedness of European subjects in oppressive systems like colonialism and their aftermaths in forms of coloniality.

As "implicated subjects" we inhabit or benefit from regimes of domination that we neither set up, nor control (Rothberg 2019). Practices of solidarity that are dedicated to unlearning commit to a critical understanding of *difference, relationalities, implicatedness*, and *responsibilities.* In this sense, I propose that a collective practice of unlearning needs to build upon contradictions and bear their incommensurability; on the one hand, they recognize how socially constructed categories such as race have real and direct consequences for both the material and symbolic conditions that affect individuals, groups, and institutions, and how these relate to each other. On the other hand, practices of unlearning scrutinize the social constructions of differences (such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and social class) that always already constitute our lives and appear as quasi-natural and normalized. Here, practices of unlearning lay bare categories' factual violence *and* fictional character while engaging with both at the same time to further intervene in the world.

Unlearning Routines of the Impossible

The modern-colonial regime under which the *Sites for Unlearning* have been practiced allows only certain experiences and expressions to emerge. These experiences are arrested as routines of thinking and doing (in the form of certain temporalities and not others, certain calls to order, individualized, certain categorizations, as fact or fiction, etc.). These routines thus determine what I experience as allegedly possible and impossible. The attention of the collective work of unlearning is directed toward unlearning these routines of the impossible toward a plurality of sensorial experiences that make other worlds possible.

Wall Patrols

It began with a routine check by a technician who was busy fighting the mold and fungi in our buildings — a common inquiry to reduce health risks in educational institutions.

An inspector joined, and together with the technician, scanned a wall with an infrared temperature taker. It was suspected as having fungal infestation. The walls in this institution had been damp for years, and this somehow explained the wall's life force. We didn't yet have any other explanation for it.

As wall patrols became more frequent, my colleagues and I managed to get hold of some of these scan reports. It was hard to believe what we found. Over time, we became more skilled in reading them: hundreds of legs are buried in the walls — never pairs, but rather a right leg, or left foot, or parts of each. Yes, you're reading this right: a leg, a foot, a toe.

Once I overcame my incredulity, I further learned about scan specifics: the knee, shin, or calf of a leg, or a heel.

We tried (without much success) to find those whose legs had been buried in the wall. As we did this, colleagues began to talk about unexplainable pain in their legs. We suspected the walls might be causing a kind of phantom pain, concealing they lost a body part. It was as if their legs had gotten stuck in the institutional walls. Caught in the act of crossing these walls. Many started to change their way of walking: waddling, strangely dancing, stumbling, floundering, limping through the corridors. To this day, this behavior is regarded as a strange anomaly at the institution.

Institutions fight back, patrol borders and boundaries, devise technologies to freeze, catch, congeal crossings. Which of the many walls, why this wall and not that, we don't know — yet?

Crossing walls affected me as well. I bruised myself, as if the weight of the walls snuck into me, causing inner damage. It showed itself through irritations on my skin. Close up, the texture was like one of the walls that I pass many times each week. I have been lucky to not yet get stuck. We have learned to carry institutional borders within us. Still puzzled while studying what our bodies are able to do, we dive into reports of predecessors that hint at similar capacities. Dana traverses walls and the institution of linear time, connecting to her colonial ancestry. Paulo learns to walk differently while spanning institutional lives. Sara chips away at the walls.

Meanwhile, we have developed little exercises since we do not use infrared technology. We regularly listen to the walls. I lean close to one, touch it with my ear and hands, calming down, breathing in, breathing out. I attempt to become aware of, and register the sounds, the energy waves, in combination with the temperature, and texture, emanating from or through the wall. The body parts seem alive, sending signals, communicating with the wall's materiality, altering traversing waves. We believe we can learn a great deal from the walls and their inhabitants about the histories of institutional separation. We are about to demolish one wall, attempting to set free some of the limbs that got stuck, bracing ourselves for what might happen.

On Unlearning Sedimented Practices: Stories Involving Everyday Whiteness and Quick Fixes

by Nancy Jouwe

The notion of unlearning, on *how not to*, invites us in its most basic form to look at ourselves purposely and to become aware, analyze, and make conscious choices to not act, to not engage anymore in a particular way. For instance, I unlearned to eat sugar, smoke, and drink alcohol. And contrary to popular belief, I don't have a miserable life right now. In fact, the opposite is true. But while I was an avid smoker and a regular drinker, who equated drinking with fun and friends, I would have thought it impossible to go without them. We usually say *stopped doing so and so* but I see unlearning as something that includes a purposeful process, followed by the actual moment where one stops and embraces a process involving positive awareness of this new reality.

Many of my peers as well as myself are reminded of the everyday of unlearning quite often in these times. As we do this collective work of unlearning in the arts, heritage, and museum sectors, and as we try to engage in a more decolonial praxis (Jouwe 2018), there comes a time when the question pops up: why are certain practices so persistent, and so difficult to unlearn? Is it being comfortable in set ways, not wanting to really give up power and privilege, or is it simply ignorance? By trying to take down walls and borders, we stumble upon other, tougher ones. In the Netherlands, we have seen that taking on slavery has finally become okay for institutions, while tackling race issues is a much harder topic to grapple with. They are like sedimented practices, old habits that never die. These everyday habits are institutional practices in themselves (see "Instead of Solving Paradoxes and Contradictions," on pages 95–121 in this book). To understand this is helpful in not getting too frustrated while being involved in work that engages in antiracism or the transformation of colonial habits. Prepare yourself to be in it for the long haul.

In this text, I continue my thoughts around matters of unlearning by moving from museum spaces, as I did in my earlier article (Jouwe 2018), into other institutional spaces. As someone who has been engaged in putting slavery on the Dutch public agenda, I have seen how in one generation (i.e., twenty years), we as a mainstream Dutch society have moved from ignorance and neglect around the topic to now understanding in growing numbers that colonial slavery is Dutch history.

One could argue that we have unlearned to separate slavery history and Dutch history in the Netherlands. Community organizers, activists, researchers, and artists from at least three generations have been involved in helping a larger Dutch community to understand how deeply involved the Dutch were

in the history of slavery, and that this involvement does not only pertain to the Atlantic world but also involves Indian Ocean slavery. One could say we are in the process of collective unlearning right now in 2023.

Here I want to zoom in on some particular aspects of this longer process. I am interested in how we can activate unlearning practices in institutional spaces that claim a focus on slavery history, colonial afterlives, and antiracism. For the purposes of this piece of writing, I am especially interested in when we hit walls together, so I will share two cases that involve sedimented practices that function like old habits. Together the cases engage in different parts of the process and different institutional practices all at once. The cases involve the past, the present, and the future, and how we look at and deal with ourselves and others, and the dynamics of a shared yet fluctuating *we*.

Before diving into the actual cases, I will provide some context. Furthermore, the notion of the institution is used here in two ways: as an organizational foundation (like the museum) and as an established practice. This article comes with caveats for I do not assume for one minute to know it all. I am simply sharing processes I have personally been involved in, after writing my earlier article on unlearning five years ago. As such, the cases are acquired through participatory action research. I was directly involved with both cases discussed, reflected on them with others directly and indirectly involved, and made notes or publicized about them in earlier instances.[1]

Dutch Dynamics on Slavery History and the Self

In the last twenty years, the Dutch colonial and slavery past in the Netherlands has become a focal point in Dutch society, culminating in recent and unprecedented formal apologies that were issued by several Dutch dignitaries. The apologies based on commissioned research on the slavery history of each

1 The two cases took place in the period 2018–22. In case one I was involved as commissioned party, in case two I was involved as co-organizer of the international meeting, which took place in Germany. About case one, we wrote a long essay, which can be found online: Guno Jones, Nancy Jouwe, and Susan Legêne, "Opdracht gestrand: Hoe de vraag naar de doorwerking van kolonialisme en slavernij in Amsterdam en Utrecht leidde tot meer vragen" (Assignment Lost: How the question of the afterlives of colonialism and slavery in Amsterdam and Utrecht led to more questions), 2023, www.research.vu.nl/en/publications/opdracht-gestrand-hoe-de-vraag-naar-de-doorwerking-van-kolonialis-2.

of Holland's biggest cities came from the mayors, and were followed by the formal apology of Prime Minister Mark Rutte on December 19, 2022. Rutte referred in his speech to this process as a comma, not a full stop—quoting multidisciplinary artist Serana Angelista—suggesting a space for reparations, without being very concrete.

As it turned out, the Dutch king could not stay behind. *Ten kon drai* (times have changed) exclaimed King Willem-Alexander in the Surinamese language Sranan Tongo during his formal apology speech for the history of slavery. He did this as head of state in front of the national slavery monument at the Oosterpark in Amsterdam on July 1, 2023. Rain was pouring down as he spoke his words. The weather somehow accentuated the solemn importance of the event with beautifully dressed invited guests listening in, while hiding under their umbrellas. Many more visitors were standing behind fences and a wave of cheers was audible after his apology mid-speech. The king included a plea for forgiveness for the role of the House of Orange in the slave trade and slavery, ending with the words *Ten kon drai.* He was the first monarch in the world to apologize for the Dutch role and for the role of his family in the history of slavery, making him one of the headlines in the international press while his speech was aired live on Dutch public TV. The wave of apologies was, without exception, based on the commissioned research projects, and garnered major media attention from primetime TV to long interviews in daily newspapers to airtime on popular radio shows.

For Dutch society, this all-out attention functioned as a collective, rapid growth spurt in 2020–23. It was quite a transformation within the Dutch mainstream, after a century of silence or silencing or downplaying (depending on who you speak to) of this history of the Dutch global slave trade. With political pressure rising locally in other Dutch cities, now both provinces and even the state were following suit, including more apologies and research publications. These events have proven to be historic, to say the least.

I have argued elsewhere that this could not have happened if it wasn't for key people on the ground: activists, local politicians, and community-organizers, often from Afro-Caribbean descent (and other postcolonial communities), who pushed for this narrative to finally be heard (Jouwe 2023, 42). The global Black Lives Matter 2020 demonstrations strongly amplified this process and probably for the first time in history, a Dutch prime minister publicly stated that the Netherlands had a race problem.[2] A sense of urgency

within Dutch society ensued that had already had to come to terms with a decade of protests against the Dutch blackface tradition of Zwarte Piet (Black Pete). Now the afterlife of slavery really came into the discussion.

Case One: On Unlearning Quick Fixes

Several of the earlier mentioned research projects on slavery in Dutch cities and provinces served conclusions as well as recommendations that emphasized the importance of research on racism and current race relations. Centralizing and acknowledging the interconnectedness of the history of slavery and colonialism with today's race relations including racism, was not a given for many Dutch people who were simply not used to looking at their country nor themselves as being capable of racist practices and who were just getting used to the idea of slavery history being Dutch history.

But coming to terms with the realization of deep involvement as a nation with the history of slavery also means working on the afterlives of slavery, as African American scholar Saidiya Hartman has explained. She speaks on the American case mostly but has influenced different institutional and transnational fields (Hartman 2022). With the notion of "the afterlife" she created space to think through the impact of slavery in current societies and how it resonates in everyday lives of descendants of enslaved people, both materially and immaterially. Her work has had impact on artists, scholars, activists, and curators, in places including the Netherlands.[3]

2 Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte stated during a national press conference on June 3, 2020: "Dat is ook een Nederlands probleem. Ook hier is racisme. Ook hier is discriminatie. Dat is niet alleen een Amerikaans fenomeen" (That's also a Dutch problem. We also have racism here. We also have discrimination here. That's not just an American phenomenon). My translation.

3 At the Tropenmuseum (tropical museum, now Wereldmuseum) in Amsterdam, the semi-permanent exhibition *Afterlives of Slavery* (October 6, 2017 – May 25, 2021) used Hartman's coinage to think through ways in which slavery has also impacted the Netherlands. The museum's website explains: "The exhibition places the enslaved and their descendants centre stage. To initiate a sometimes difficult but productive dialogue, the Tropenmuseum has sought out personal stories from past and present that bring the history of slavery and its current-day legacies up close." See *Afterlives of Slavery*, press release, Tropenmuseum, October 3, 2017, www.tropenmuseum.nl/en/afterlives-slavery. A leading daily Dutch newspaper made the headline "Tropenmuseum-gaat-voorop-in-dekolonisatie" (Tropenmuseum takes the lead in decolonization), Leendert van der Valk, October 12, 2017, *NRC*, www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/10/12/tropenmuseum-gaat-voorop-in-dekolonisatie-13460466-a1576878?t=1697286498.

Local politicians picked up on the recommendations by calling for motions to have research done on current-day race relations and racism in their cities. With these motions being accepted—a sign of the times—public servants now had to get to work and I was invited to become involved in setting up such research for two cities who decided to work on this research together.

I teamed up with Dr. Guno Jones and Prof. Susan Legêne, both having rich and important track records when it comes to these histories and their resonances, and both affiliated with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Jones and I had discussions with our point persons of the municipalities to get clarity and wrote and rewrote a project plan, a process that took over a year. Point persons changed as well as the research question. Suffice to say that from the get-go, the process of working on this with the municipalities proved to be complicated.

As clearcut as the process of doing historical research had been—which Jones and I had been directly involved in—as difficult and unclear was the process of setting up this research with the municipalities involved. Our conclusion was, after a year and a half of going back and forth without consensus on how to proceed, that we needed to step out. Instead, we decided to discuss the intricacies of this process in a long essay (in Dutch), co-written by Jones, Legêne, and myself. We offered it to our municipal clients for input as well as transparency, after which we finalized our piece. Here, I highlight only some aspects.

The research questions the municipalities (hereafter: client) wanted covered, stayed unclear for quite a while and after formulating one, the research questions again changed. First, we were to look at the current impact of the history of slavery, then we were asked to focus this research question on the policy terrains of the respective municipalities. This was followed by the client wanting to move the research from the impact of slavery history to coloniality, a key concept within decolonial scholarship.

Our position as researchers was that a translation of our research into relevant policy areas should only be made afterward by the client, not us. Secondly, we adhere to decolonial scholarship, but this shift to coloniality, given the timeframe of a year and three months we had left, was not wise in our opinion. More fundamentally, a concept like coloniality had far-reaching implications, and did the client really want that? A domain-oriented approach that would feed into local policymaking (as the client would have it) clashes with the concept of coloniality because coloniality implies a certain lens on

society, where modernity and coloniality form a pair with coloniality speaking on the violence and the erasure of stories, which involves an analysis that refers to all kinds of life areas and levels being impacted. The result would be a reductive analysis that would not do justice to coloniality as a concept. As I shared in my earlier article on unlearning:

> Coloniality is different from colonialism in that coloniality does not need colonialism to function, its logic exists by way of continuing the "hidden process of expropriation, exploitation, pollution, and corruption that underlies the narrative of modernity, as promoted by institutions and actors belonging to corporations, industrialized nation-states, museums, and research institutions."[4] In other words, coloniality is the underlying logic of colonialism that continues beyond it (Jouwe 2018, 133).

As a result, by choosing coloniality we anticipated that—especially given how the process had unfolded up to then—the client would be served with research too difficult to swallow, both in terms of conceptual approach as well as content and recommendations. And it also clashed with our primary concern as researchers, of doing justice to this multiformity without prior division into policy areas. Moreover, I felt that choosing coloniality was about tapping into a fad, something trendy to try out. In short, we simply felt they had not thought this through.

Another point of contestation was our methodology. We wanted to work with vignettes, which entail small stories or examples from real life that give insight into the practical workings of, in this case, everyday racism. I have used vignettes in my earlier piece on unlearning. It is an accepted and much used methodology in the scholarly field of social sciences. But the client did not think it a good idea for reasons that to this day remain unclear to me personally. They simply stated that they did not think it worked well nor would it be convincing methodologically.

Looking back, we reiterated that knowledge about the past cannot simply be translated into policy in the present just like that. The clients' demand for policy recommendations—understandable in itself—does require historiographical understanding on their part. All actors involved—politicians, civil

4 As explained by Rolando Vázquez Melken, during the Decolonial Summer School, Middelburg, June 17, 2015.

servants, we as researchers—move in a context where there is great external pressure and an unstable political tide, locally as well as nationally. It seems very likely they needed a quick fix. But looking for a quick fix in order to tackle an infrastructure of ideas, practices, and habits based on racial hierarchies, once sedimented into colonial policy, is exactly what we need to unlearn. Quick fixes won't work, not with this.

As researchers we did not succeed in creating consensus and clarity on the research trajectory and we could have done things differently. During the process it became noticeable that there was a lack of trust toward us as researchers (for example, questioning our methodology, wanting to build in extra milestones) and we could have stepped out earlier. But we were intrinsically motivated and wanted to stay with it. We also could have stood our ground much stronger. It is not clear if that would have helped though. The shifting of point persons (both white and POC), while dealing with two municipalities at the same time did not work well on the levels of communication and content. The municipalities were operating from a position where external pressure

influenced a delicate process and topic, while the people involved setting it up did not always understand the implications well enough. At times, I felt they were in over their heads.

Case Two: On Unlearning the Comfortability of Whiteness

Since the publication *White Innocence* (2016) by Gloria Wekker, who wrote an ethnography on the Dutch white dominant self, a heightened awareness that a white ethnicity even exists, has ensued in larger Dutch circles. The publication helped raise awareness that white people practice whiteness while not necessarily being aware of that fact. Moreover, whiteness in a Dutch landscape comes with a presumed stance of innocence, which means—among other things—being incapable of being racist. The next case shows how white innocence can work. It involves two women, who, for the purpose of anonymity will be called Sandra and Debby. Sandra is a young Black non-formal educator on antiracism. Debby is an older white woman who does work on

Militia Company of District VIII under the Command of Captain Roelof Bicker, Bartholomeus van der Helst, c.1640–43 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). In the documentary *New Light. Rijksmuseum & Slavery* (2021) by Ida Does, we see Eveline Sint Nicolaas, a white woman who is a curator of history at the Rijksmuseum since 1998. She explains that only recently has she been able to really see the Black boy in the middle of the painting. She had unlearned to see him as a mere prop in an early modern painting. Now, she cannot unsee him.

colonial history and antiracism. They have different nationalities yet both are European.

A few years ago, Sandra and Debby met for the first and only time during an international gathering on antiracism, colonial history, and non-formal education (of which I was a co-organizer), where Debby gave a workshop, with Sandra participating. For the purposes of this paper, I asked Sandra to reflect on what transpired during the workshop, because I wanted to centralize her voice. This is why Debby was not interviewed; she did not communicate nor display a practice of reflection about the workshop with those involved afterward.

Sandra, a student at the time, explains:

> During that workshop, the trainer, Debby, was explaining an exercise we should do. It was a roleplay, bringing a picture to life, that of a slave and a master. The master was seated in a chair and the slaves were sitting or standing next to the master. A group of three was to reenact it. When I heard about the assignment, I felt myself resisting. I felt I was exceeding my boundaries. I anticipated that it would be very painful, especially being in a slave position. I did not see a need for myself—as someone who has experienced racism as an Afro-German—that I could learn something from this, and I also felt no need to go through the pain of doing this. I immediately said that I am not going to do this. I had such strong feelings about it that I wanted to leave the room. A discussion followed. Debby acted very surprised about it and said that it had never happened before. I tried to explain why I did not want to do the exercise. Debby responded by saying that I could be in the power position. Another participant, who was white, noticed that I was very serious about it and also refused to do the exercise.
>
> I was very confused and unsure during this time. I felt I was not heard when I said I had experienced racism. Later I realized this moment was racist, but at the time I felt I was maybe exaggerating. I got very angry. I thought, I cannot be normal in this group. Now, there is conflict, there is no more harmony in the group. The other two participants were also there, and

> I felt that if I was not in the workshop, there would not be a problem. Meanwhile, Debby explained why she did what she did and that it was a good exercise. I doubted myself, because Debby was the professional. I felt exposed, being the emotional one. I did not come there to have a conflict. Racism happens all the time, but I had hoped to be in a safe space in this workshop.

Sandra reflects,

> I even felt guilty, which is typical of racist situations. When I talked to Debby myself, Debby did not get it, but when white people explained it, Debby did understand. She seemed only capable to listen to white voices. It is violent that Debby thinks she can do this exercise. Why does she do this? Debby is clearly not aware of the power imbalance that already exists.

After the workshop, the next program item followed, which was a thirty-minute walk outside, toward a museum. The rest of the group was still unaware of what had happened. During the walk to the museum, Debby tried to talk to Sandra several times. During those interactions Debby tried to explain why the exercise actually did work well and that it simply was the case that Sandra did not understand it. Sandra did not really engage actively, still struggling with her emotions.

At the museum, the group went in to listen to a series of talks. While that happened, Sandra stayed outside together with the white ally while still shaken. She explained what had happened to one of the coordinators of the training. Debby noticed it happening and tried to join the conversation. This made for another awkward situation.

Slowly, the news spread with other members of the coordinating team, including people who knew Debby, who then decided to intervene and try and hold space. One went to Sandra to listen to Sandra's story and give space and emotional support to her while the other sat down with Debby to get clarity on what had gone wrong since it became obvious that Debby did not read the situation well.

The next day, the coordinating team had a crisis meeting over the incident. The coordinators (including two POC and one white person) decided to give everyone some space to process what had happened. The next day was also the last day and with only a morning session left, the case was discussed briefly in the round-up session. Sandra:

> During the round-up session, with all present, Debby said she understood what she had done wrong and said sorry. To me that apology was not authentic. The apology in the group was performative, like, see, I have paid my dues. Debby should have apologized to me face to face, one on one. And Debby should have explained what she was sorry about exactly. The wrap-up round continued, and Debby did not ask for a response from me. So, there was no space and I felt forced to say, I forgive you.

Sandra notes that she has since been able to transform the traumatic event into something she has learned from and which she uses in her work as a trainer. Debby has remained in a position wherein she does not seem to really grasp what she did wrong and never talked about it again with the people present.

There are a couple of things to consider while reflecting on this case. Debby's position could be read as someone who remains in the habit of maintaining white innocence, where she "did good" as a white antiracist trainer, as if that was enough. The fact that she was called out by a younger Black person, did not make her question herself, on the contrary. She remained confident she was on the right track and actually felt the need to reiterate this several times, adding to the emotional discomfort of Sandra. Only after Debby was called out by white people, did she engage with the critique in a more self-reflexive manner, albeit temporarily, it seems.

This case also shows that when white people engage in antiracism work, it does not automatically mean they understand that their own racial position brings a power dynamic they should be aware of. Being on the right side (because of antiracism work) seemed to have brought a certain comfortability, which elevated Debby to a position that is beyond recourse. Debby did not accept criticism from a young Black person, only from those the same age and/or same "race". Is this because Sandra is younger and therefore assumed to be inexperienced? Or is it because Sandra is Black. Or both? As noted by Sandra, she knows very well what racist practices look like, having experienced them in everyday instances in Germany. Her intersectional position already has made her quite knowledgeable on this. She came to the workshop, assuming a safe space where she could actually share and learn together with others in the group.

What is also noticeable is that whiteness has been externalized by Debby. It would have been useful for Debby to position herself as a white woman in

the workshop and openly state what that means or could mean, making it clear both to herself and the participants what whiteness entails and that she herself is exercising power simply for being white and being the workshop leader. Unlearning to automatically be on the right side of a situation pertaining to antiracist work, is clearly not a given, as this case shows.

Lastly, I want to focus on something Sandra remembered: "Debby acted very surprised." Debby's act of being surprised is interesting to see for how could she even be surprised by Sandra's reaction? Christina Sharpe in her brilliant publication *Ordinary Notes* (2023) calls this a "culture of surprise." Sharpe writes:

> The machinery of whiteness constantly deploys violence—and in a mirror register, constantly manufactures wonder, surprise, and innocence in relation to that violence. That innocence-making machine rubs out violence at the very moment of its manufacture. Michel-Rolph Trouillot tells us: *Naivité is often an excuse for those who exercise power. For those upon whom that power is exercised, naiveté is always a mistake* (2023, n217).

Sharpe refers to Michel-Rolph Trouillot, who wrote the influential text *Silencing the Past* (1995), an analysis of the silences in our historical narratives and what these silences reveal about inequalities of power. Sandra's knowledge base was silenced in this case. And while Sandra clearly was not alone, she did feel isolated and felt that she at the time lacked the words/confidence to push back at the violence done to her.

The group including the coordinating group has learned from this case and could have handled things differently. Steps that could have been taken were, for instance, to divide the group into a POC/Black and a white group that would hold space and figure out what was needed. This could mean several things, such as talking through what has happened and what that means, vis-à-vis the general theme of the gathering, which was about non-formal non-racist education. But it could also have meant sharing experiences or doing breathing exercises. A space would have been opened for healing, sharing, and reflecting. For Sandra it could have given the support she could have used from a larger group. This could have helped her to gain confidence in standing up to Debby instead of feeling she needed to accept her apology. For Debby it could have given space to reflect and more actively open a process to unlearn harmful practices of whiteness. Debby could have

practiced active listening and actually used Sandra's input to become a better workshop facilitator.

In Conclusion

While I entered spaces where unlearning practices in institutional spaces that claim the importance of slavery history, colonial afterlives, and antiracism were to be activated, I encountered walls, sedimented practices that function like old habits. The cases presented in this text involve the habit of the quick fix and the comfortability of whiteness. These individual cases are offered because it helps in diving into personal experiences to make abstract matters tangible. Both show habits that are tough to let go of or to be conscious of while being engaged in sensitive processes.

The cases are interrelated because they both have to deal with issues of race and racism and this is often so uncomfortable for people, that one wants to move to solutions quickly, looking for quick fixes, such as a policy research document or a mere apology done in a closing session. But we need time to sit with the problem, because the questions that come with it are: is the problem understood, in what ways is everyone involved implicated, can we reflect on our own respective roles? In both cases these "sedimented practices" or "old habits" prove to be unproductive during the process.

Learning is uncomfortable, but so is unlearning. And if you do not know that you actually need to unlearn something or worse, don't want to, change will not happen.

In both cases the goal was to create awareness as well as transformation through knowledge production and knowledge sharing, while in fact some/all of the stakeholders involved in creating a productive space where this could take place, lacked the conditions to actually do so. I personally have gone into a process of unlearning—thanks to both these cases—to stay loyal to a fault.

As said, this involves the past, the present, and the future, and how we look at and deal with ourselves and others, and the dynamics of a shared yet fluctuating *we*. It tells us something about where we are today as a Dutch nation, while learning more about where we came from. When we dare to unlearn, we have a better chance of making it together.

Instead of Solving Paradoxes and Contradictions

An earlier version of this essay is published in Krauss 2017, 43–63.

Paradoxes, contradictions, and binaries—my engagement with unlearning is full of them. Paradoxes involve contradictory, yet entangled aspects that persist over time. Even with the application of sound reasoning, and a desire to solve them, paradoxes lead to somewhat unacceptable conclusions. Paradoxes are not only part of abstract, logical reasoning, but also find their ways into daily life and human interactions as so-called double binds, in which a person is confronted with two irreconcilable demands or undesirable courses of action. A binary can be a paradox, or more specifically, a double bind. As someone who grew up in Western institutions and their schooling systems, I encountered paradoxes in school subjects such as math, or natural science, with the imperative that contradictions are there to be solved or expelled from the equation. I came somewhat late to the suspicion that there might be a connection between pushing paradoxes outside of a logical, rational approach, and my disparate experiences of paradoxes and binaries in daily life.

In the introduction to *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes binaries as practical and theoretical constructions that fix worlds as they take shape with all their injustices and oppressions. To counteract binaries and intervene in global injustices, she insists, instead of deciding for one side of the binary, we need to "learn to live with contradictory instructions" and "play the double bind" (2012, 2–34).[1] Why is a critical focus on binaries important at all? Feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial scholarship, to name a few, have long shown that distinctions, such as those made between man/mind/culture/able/white/center and woman/nature/exotic/disabled/other/margin are anything but neutral, and imply asymmetrical, hierarchical, yet entangled patterns that have dominated Western thought and life.

As feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz puts it: "Dichotomous thinking necessarily hierarchizes and ranks the two polarized terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart" (1994, 3). For example, the disembodied and rational mind has been privileged over the "animal," "female," and "other" body. We know that the Cartesian body-mind split sustains patriarchal and racialized power relations in which "the unmarked given or a priori category is reserved for

1 For rich perspectives on Spivak's book, and the postcolonial double bind, see Castro Varela and Haghighat 2023.

the mind and for the disembodied white masculinity as soon as body matters arise" (Asberg 2009, 29). Spivak has written extensively about the necessity of finding ways to deal with binaries that would be different from the reiteration of racialized and hierarchical power relations—"unlearning one's privileges" (1990, 9) and "playing the double bind" (2012, 3) are two of them.

In the following, I attempt to link both concepts and examine their potentials to approach processes of unlearning, relating these to what I call routines of the impossible.

Unlearning My Privilege[2]

Spivak coined the term "unlearning our privileges"[3] (1990, vii) in the mid-1980s. As with many of her terms, she does not provide an exhaustive explanation, but rather activates the term over several texts. Spivak describes "unlearning one's privileges" as the process of actively dismissing or getting rid of "the conviction that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs" (2004, 532). Privilege here is understood as an advantage, rank, or entitlement (often unrecognized) that are based on, for example, social class, ethnic or racial category, gender, ability. Unlearning one's privileges cannot be adequately understood without paying attention to Spivak as a postcolonial theorist deeply connected to the project of deconstruction. She describes deconstruction as a practice that insistently critiques the grand narratives of modernity, such as scientific rationality, progress, or emancipation of humanity (Spivak 1990, 17–18). For her, a deconstructive approach reminds us again and again that "when a narrative is constructed, something is left out" (*ibid.*, 18). In manifold essays and lectures, she unpacks how a Eurocentric subject-position tied to the narratives of Enlightenment and modernity is oblivious to and complicit in unjust structures that European colonialism has inflicted upon the world, and prevail in forms of coloniality till today. Moreover, Spivak questions

2 This text is thoroughly involved with specific terms by Spivak. Therefore, I decided to take two of the key terms as subtitles. With this gesture, I attempt to indicate how these Spivakian notions have gained a life of their own within some of the collaborative practices that I discuss in this book.

3 Spivak does not provide one unified term, instead she uses unlearning my/our/your/one's privilege(s) according to the contexts of the texts.

large programmatic solutions and excavates the limits of these narratives. However, a deconstructive approach is certainly *not* about wanting to stop narration as such. Most importantly, it is itself implicated in the impulse to narrate and acknowledges that "we cannot but narrate" (*ibid*., 19). In the same way, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean identify Spivak's adamant attention toward the narratives that we construct as the acknowledgement of a desire to narrate, while nevertheless uncompromisingly investigating our omissions and exclusions (1996, 10–15). Spivak herself describes a deconstructive stance as a position in which one has to "persistently critique a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit" (1993, 284). In other words, she urges the reader to acknowledge the desire to think in terms of origins and ends with finding multiple ways into theories and narratives. What is important here is to recognize that this is rather "*a need* than the way to truth" (Spivak 1990, 20). Since Spivak clearly does not object to narration, I interpret her approach as vigilance in and a critique of how we *relate* to the narratives we produce, inhabit, or are forced to be a part of. These narratives influence how I know of, and act in the world; accordingly, they shape how I engage in social practices and encounters on an everyday basis and see myself in relation to injustices in a globalized world. They are therefore ingrained in the existing modes of *relating* between ourselves and others. In this sense I understand Spivak's unlearning my privilege as a proposition for an intervention in the ways we narrate and practice our relationships to each other.

According to Spivak, unlearning one's privileges has been subject to misunderstandings. She distanced herself from the term when it seemed no longer workable for her.[4] Working through one of these misunderstandings, feminist philosopher Linda M. Alcoff (1991, 5–32) argues that unlearning one's privileges should not be confused with stepping down from one's position of authority in the sense of abandoning a socio-cultural position. Spivak reminds us that this act might even reinforce a certain privilege rather than disestablishing it. Professor for Pedagogy and Social Work María do Mar Castro Varela (2008) argues along the same lines when interpreting unlearning one's privileges as becoming aware of one's privileges and *using* these

4 María do Mar Castro Varela (2008) states that in 2008, Spivak strongly distanced herself from "unlearning your privilege" in a lecture at Humboldt-University in Berlin, precisely because of the confusion the term provoked.

privileges to face and work on social injustice. Hence, with unlearning one's privileges Spivak focuses on social, cultural, and economic positionings not by refraining from them, but by exposing their inseparability from privileges of identity, such as race, class, nationality, gender. In a deconstructive approach, she demands taking into account and investigating the structures of my own productions, especially the processes whereby I naturalize personal experiences and desires into generalized truths. As a consequence, I start to question my seemingly instinctual responses and attractions as learned. On this basis, unlearning one's privileges can be understood and followed as a relentless working and thinking through of one's history, prejudices, and assumptions in order to confront social injustices. While I agree with this interpretation of unlearning as "*using* your privilege," I do think it only makes sense when, at the same time, it is brought together with a critical practice of redistribution. Otherwise unlearning your privilege remains in a state of limbo that is in danger of being instrumentalized as a self-reflexive endeavor all too easily trapped in an academic exercise.

Attempts in Practicing Unlearning

How does unlearning my privileges relate to the specific sites for unlearning that this publication speaks to? In the sites, the different groups have time and again reinterpreted privileges as those (inherited) advantages, rights, ranks, or benefits that to a great extent have brought each of us to the particular point, position, and understanding in our lives at which they are situated right at that moment in the site for unlearning.[5] Obviously, this takes place very differently according to the sites, hence the roles of the participants (including me) in these, and what is at stake shifts respectively. In hindsight, I read the process of unlearning during *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not*

5 As I have discussed in different forms in this book, these privileges are very often perceived as *quasi-natural*, and therefore not perceived as learned and incorporated power relations that have been passed on over generations in forms of knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes. See also "Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)" in this book on pages 49ff for inconspicuous calls to order, "Bodies to Think With" on pages 123ff for bodily thinking, "Hidden Curriculum" on pages 156ff for schooling and the physicality of education, and "Afterword: Unlearning as a Scaffolding for Living" on pages 223–25 for the relationship between daily physical routines and worldviews.

Given (2008–12) as speaking up against racism and confronting it publicly as detailed in the first essay in this book that contextualizes how I came to unlearning, while trying to deal with my own complicities, to endure ridicule, silencing, and threats, and excavating relations with many actors before us. During *Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)* (2011–present), also explored in the aforementioned essay, I have tried to find my place and voice backstage in a supporting role. This has been paired since with institutional work against racism. *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)* (2012–present) has been a study of the psychosomatic implications of unlearning, when it comes to the question of impossibilities. What does it do to our bodies when being exposed to an alleged impossibility? How do our diverse privileges play out in this? *Site for Unlearning (My Library)* (2013–present) grapples with the role that categorizations and reference systems play in the constellation of unlearning, privileges, and ignorance. Moreover, the collaboration with the Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons team in Utrecht on *Site for Unlearning (Art Organisation)* (2013–20) dives into the organizational questions of a mid-scale art space in relation to unlearning. Here, we studied our own — and the organization's — habits, privileges, and complicities in overproduction, as this may be present in busyness, and optimizing logics. We developed so-called *Unlearning Exercises*, prefiguring an end to the illusion of limitless growth in a concrete art organization and focusing on maintenance, reproductive work, and questions of social justice.[6] In all of the sites, the role of collectivity, and how to work together are crucial. How can we keep attention to non-dominant differences in the way we approach privileges? Who is "we"[7] in a particular formation of unlearning? And what is the role of habits (of thinking and doing), and their relationship to temporalities that the sites bring forward? For example, the team of Casco and I have studied Spivak and tried to understand her approach toward our ends. This has been utterly challenging. It has been difficult to establish situations to approach (our) privileges and talk about them. Discussions around navel-gazing (also from the outside as a reaction to the project) have frequently gotten in the

6 While reworking this text, Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons launched the Unlearning Center that attempts to carry forward, intensify, and redirect, what we worked with in the *Unlearning Exercises* and subsequent book (2018).

7 See also the subsection on the different I's and we's in the introduction on page 16 in this book.

way. There were those rare moments when we allowed ourselves to touch upon differences of class, gender, race, and age within the group and their impact on the work. A few of these conversations entered the transcriptions in *Unlearning Exercises* (2018, 17–55).

In many of the sites for unlearning projects and exercises, we have approached unlearning my privileges in a first instance as becoming aware of my automatic reactions and responses, developing context-specific exercises, or approaches to interrogate these. These automatic responses are learned and tied to one's privileges through identity and other social divisions. They are invoked by "structures of privilege unleashed by a history of power and domination" (Trouillot 2000, 183), but now taken for granted and deemed quasi-natural. As I understand Trouillot these privileges are far from being individual, but rather through our historical implication we reproduce them, and sustain deeply ingrained assumptions and prejudices about race, gender, nationality, etc. We therefore also engender a closing down of possibilities, "a loss of other options, other knowledges" (Landry and MacLean 1996, 4) for how to relate to each other. Spivak describes this as "unlearning our privilege *as our loss*" (1990, 9, my emphasis).

With the sites, we ask how to address these taken-for-granted responses and take them out of their seemingly individual attribution. In one recurring experiment, in *Site for Unlearning (My Library)*, we approached links between automatic reactions and embodied institutional processes. The example of sharing references, or teaching work speaks to these experiments: I spend quite some time meeting students in groups or on individual bases, looking at their work, exchanging references, and contextualizing this through other artistic work. It is quite spontaneous work that takes place in workshops, conversations, and studio spaces, demanding improvisational and associative skills. A few of us agreed to write down the references that we gave to students. We studied the lists of references in terms of representation and self-narrated axes of identities, such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, discipline, in order to approach the ways we make connections, what we are attracted to, in short, our own biases and omissions. In *Site for Unlearning (My Library)* we have extended this work to lists of bibliographies, curricula, and the digital catalogue of libraries.[8]

8 Feminist Search Tools Working Group, 2020, www.feministsearchtools.nl.

From a pedagogical perspective, we have tried to connect automatic reactions and responses to our perception. This experiment entails the description and analysis of what I see, and hear, of what I experience, and respectively how I listen and respond.[9] In reference to educational theorist Paul Mecheril (2011) I call this approach "perceiving perception."[10] It focuses on the (often normalized) connections between "mere" descriptions and judgments, personal decisions, and embodied institutionalized norms and conventions. "Perceiving perception" is neither meant as a solipsistic exercise, nor should this seemingly impossible endeavor prevent us from doing it. Perceiving perception is an approach taken to come closer to what Spivak urges us to do by unlearning privileges. Becoming aware of and enduring this slow, laborious, and uncomfortable process of excavating, confronting, and crossing our biases and ignorance, in order to intervene in those (unjust) structures that we *cannot not* wish to inhabit, we look to understand and *imagine* that these desired inhabitations are part of a colonial capitalist heritage and history of domination through Western societies.

In this sense, "perceiving perception" goes beyond a solely rational approach and includes affective, sensorial, and other non-rational registers. It is here that postcolonial and decolonial scholarship and practices intersect with unlearning.

Bridging Postcolonial and Decolonial Practice

In *Vistas of Modernity*, decolonial scholar Rolando Vázquez Melken studies how aesthetics (as the field of representation and perception) manifests as a power-driven arena of modernity/colonialism. This arena does not only

9 I thank Read-in collective and Claudia Hummel. In the context of the work within these two collaborations, we have also developed further instances of this exercise; for Bookshelf Research, 2014–present, www.read-in.info/bookshelf-research/, see also "Re- and Un-Defining Tools: Exploring Intersectional Approaches to Digital Search Tools in Library Catalogues" on pages 205–22 in this book, and for "Difference As Arithmetic Exercise," which looks at the text, image, and number politics in secondary school math textbooks, Difference As Arithmetic Exercise, 2012–present, www.differenz-als-rechenaufgabe.de/index_en.html.

10 "Perceiving perception" is a translation of the German term "Wahrnehmung der Wahrnehmung" that Mecheril used in his keynote lecture to describe the role of aesthetic education at the conference *Kunstvermittlung in der Migrationsgesellschaft*, 2011; see also Barut 2012, 84–86.

regulate the way we represent the world but also how we experience our lives, our "selves"—the ways we sense, see, taste, and perceive the world, impacting how we relate to each other. Vázquez Melken calls for decolonial aesthesis, which he differentiates from modern aesthetics as "the plurality of sensorial experiences and expressions that are in excess of the modern order of aesthetics" (2019, 1). Decolonial aesthesis is a practice that responds by "humbling modernity [that] is not a shaming but an opening towards the radical diversity of the Earth worlds" (Vázquez Melken 2020, 157). It engages in "other worlds of meaning and sensing" (*ibid.*, 173) from those that modernity proposes, and acknowledges that an outside of modernity has always existed. Practices of unlearning are inspired by this, and ask "instead of producing spaces for canonizing, for the affirmation of representation, for the celebration of contemporaneity and abstraction, what would it mean to weave relations that cross the colonial difference, that are capable of listening, of hosting and not representing other worlds?" (*ibid.*, 172).

Exercises for "perceiving perception" are modest attempts or tools to approach processes of unlearning. The exercises take place within the specificities of a concrete group of people at a specific place and time (here the spontaneous reactions, feedback, and sharing of references to each other, or to students in classrooms), in order to excavate institutionalized norms, conventions, and desires that have inscribed themselves over time (for example, conditions of coloniality). The sites for unlearning are dedicated to tracing how privileges, personal experiences, and desires reverberate in macro-dimensional structures in the form of rules and (for example, national, colonial) laws, curricula—and, vice versa, how these macro dimensions get inscribed in everyday routines and conventions.[11]

Unlearning and Intersectionality

To come closer to unlearning one's privileges, I investigate the parallels and differences in the approaches on intersectionality, a key contribution by Black

11 For more detail on the bridges between postcolonial, decolonial, and anticolonial theory and practices in this book, see " Introduction and Acknowledgements: Practicing Unlearning," footnote 2, page 12 and "Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)" on pages 41–74 in this book.

feminist scholarship and debates on analyzing forms of oppression and social injustice. The term "intersectionality" was coined by feminist and critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) and further developed by feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1990). Emphasizing the importance of knowing the genealogy of feminist ideas, anthropologist Gloria Wekker (2007, 64) and others have shown that the concept can be found at work back in Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman?" speech (1851). Truth considerably predates the coining of the concept of intersectionality, which emerged from the long history of Black women's struggle in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. Writings by the Black feminist Combahee River Collective (1977/1991) and one of the first readers in Black Women's Studies with the indicative title *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 1982) are often referred to as having paved the way to conceptualizing intersectionality. The theory maintains that different effects of structures of domination intersect and mutually constitute each other in a person's life. It therefore challenges "additive models [...] [b]ecause the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, [and] any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw 1991, 140). Crenshaw examines US legal cases against employers brought by Black women, looking at how in some cases Black women are protected by anti-discrimination law only insofar as their experiences can be equated to those of "white women" or "black men."[12] The term *intersectionality* has been taken up not only within Black feminist scholarship, but also later on within feminist theory, social theory, cultural studies (Phoenix 2011), and contemporary feminist and social justice activism. In this way, intersectionality has become a key analytical tool for analyzing different forms of oppression through their connections.

Strongly related to Spivak's notion of unlearning one's privileges is her encouragement to interrogate intersecting axes of positionality through her

12 For example, Crenshaw demonstrates how a judge rejected a charge of employer discrimination against Black women because of an undifferentiated understanding of "woman" or being "Black." Since the employer had hired white women and Black men, the judge could not accept a claim of sex and race discrimination. Crenshaw exposes how "woman" is taken to mean "white women" and how "Black" is taken to mean "Black men." Her claim is that Black women's "intersecting" experience of sex and race discrimination is different to that of white women and Black men (Crenshaw 1991, 41–43).

critical attention to differences of power and the problematization of "single issue" analysis. The discrepancy between these notions, however, is crucial. Spivak does not lead the attention toward different forms of oppression in the first instance. Instead, she is interested in forms of difference that lead to a certain privilege on the side of the person, or a group of people who investigate or engage with knowledge and social struggles. In this sense, I suggest interpreting Spivak's claim of unlearning one's privileges as an inverted form of intersectionality. This move demands an investigation of the complicities and ignorance that are produced due to one's privilege. It is "[n]ot simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions" (Landry and MacLean 1996, 4). For example, in the introduction to the *Spivak Reader*, Landry and MacLean address the readers of Spivak's text explicitly. They claim that whoever these readers are (and it applies as well for me, and very likely for the readers of this very text), "we are likely to be privileged in terms of educational opportunity, citizenship, and location within the international division of labor" (*ibid.*). However, it is not enough to acknowledge that we produce omissions. Spivak demands that "we do our homework" (1990, 62), which means to work hard to acquire some "knowledge of those spaces most closed to our privileged view" (Landry and MacLean 1996, 14). In a compelling passage during an interview with postcolonial scholar Sneja Gunew (Spivak 1990), Spivak elaborates on what it means to do your homework. She recalls a situation in an undergraduate course, where one of the male students positioned himself, saying: "I am only a white male student, I cannot speak." This gesture, as Spivak describes it, might have been a response to the gaining ground of feminist and postcolonial studies in academic classroom discussions. However, Spivak does not accept it, but instead asks the student: "Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?" Spivak invites the student to develop a more complex position toward the silencing that he experiences due to his privileging of being white and male. She further encourages the student to "investigate what is it that silences you, rather than taking this deterministic position" (*ibid.*, 62–63). This marks a crucial moment; it is not enough to recognize one's privilege and to resign from one's authoritative position by being silent. Rather it is necessary to actively work through one's own privileged position that will finally influence how one

enters struggles of social injustice and how one engages actively in change. In this sense, unlearning one's privilege can be described as a plea to "continue working from within the contradictory, hierarchical position of professionals" (Andreotti 2007, 48), such as in the role of a teacher, researcher, or artist, and to simultaneously investigate one's own positioning, assumptions, and complicities in order to "rework existing modes of *relating*" between ourselves and others (Thiele 2011, 56).

Unlearning and the Double Bind

"Unlearning one's privilege" is one of many influential terms and concepts that Spivak has coined. Many of these terms involve the challenges of paradoxes, contradictions, and binaries: for example, her notion of the "subaltern" through which she famously argues that subalternity can no longer be claimed once a "subaltern" has been represented. The paradox revolves around the notion of representation and subalternity. Spivak sees the need of representation to understand what it means to be subaltern. However, representation of marginalized people will always be highly problematic, silencing and distorting through its systems of mediation. Feminists have read Spivak as an insistent critic who urges the "Western feminists [to] keep being critically involved in making positions of marginal women visible" (Ponsanezi 2009, 92), coupled with Spivak's relentless question to the reader as to which way they assume any relation to the subaltern (Spivak 1988, 291). Another example that relates to important questions in this book, is Spivak's suggestion of "strategic essentialism." The paradox here is the acknowledgement of the problematics of essentialism in identity claims and their quasi-naturalization in categorizations such as race, gender, and nationality, while at the same time recognizing how they might enable political agency and connect subjects for resistance (Spivak 1993). Tying this to the practice of solidarity in the contribution "Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)" on pages 41–74, interventions fall short if they only speak to the fictional character of categorizations (as they are socially constructed), and are not thought together with studying the factual violence these categories produce.

Playing the Double Bind

In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972), Gregory Bateson investigates the notion of the "double bind" in order to understand childhood schizophrenia with regard to communication in human relationships.[13] He argues that children who suffer from schizophrenia are afflicted with a double take on the world and can hardly deal with it. He describes, for example, the family relationships of these children who are regularly given messages (e.g., emotional, verbal, spatial, bodily) that at one level of communication assert something but at the other level negate or conflict with this assertion. The receiver of the contrasting messages (i.e., the child) can neither withdraw from the situation, nor have they learned to respond to it. Bateson calls this a "transcontextual situation" (1972, 250–77) and expands on this idea in noting that not everyone has to suffer under this "double bind." Instead, there are those who are able to "play" with this "double take" on the world, meaning those, "whose life is enriched by transcontextual gifts." He continues that both "are alike in one respect: for them there is always or often a 'double take'. A falling of a leaf, the greeting of a friend, or 'a primrose by the river's brim' is not 'just that and nothing more'" (*ibid*., 272).

Spivak borrows Bateson's concept of the double bind and broadens the narrow borders of mental health that a particular understanding of it in the context of a mental "disorder" has upheld. For Spivak the double bind has become a "description of all doing, all thinking, all self-conscious living, upstream from capitalism" (2012, 10). The double bind depicts our globalized present that is full of contradictions and inconsistencies; it is concrete and abstract at once. Instead of wanting to resolve these, she demands from the reader to learn to "live with contradictory instructions" (*ibid*., 3, 16). She prompts us to *not* side with one part of the binary at the expense of the other. Scholar Robert Azzarello comments on this as "the psychosocial and political predicaments of the [Western] world we live in—politically democratic and economically capitalistic—[that] is founded upon the internal contradictions of the double bind" (2013, 67). Instead of surrendering to the psychosocial and political predicaments, Spivak calls for a double take on the world in

13 For more perspectives on Bateson's double bind in relation to Spivak's take on it, see also Castro Varela and Haghighat 2023.

order to intervene in it. In a nutshell, for Spivak "learning to play the double bind" is a tool for facing binaries. Spivak urges that one find different ways of addressing the injustices of globalization than through a dichotomous siding with, for example, modernity or tradition, modernity or coloniality, colonial or postcolonial (or decolonial), individual or collective. Instead, she proposes one learn "inhabiting the two ends of the spectrum" and "working at the limits of the double bind of the *abstract* and the *concrete*" (2012, 4). Spivak attempts to work at the limits of the double bind through an intervention in the canon of European Enlightenment literature. More specifically, she intervenes in Friedrich Schiller's perspective on aesthetic education in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). She understands her own intervention as a way of "affirmatively sabotaging Schiller" (Spivak 2012, 2). Whereas a common understanding of sabotage is that one works on a tool up to the point that one cannot use it anymore, her idea of "affirmative sabotage" would rework a tool, so one can use it for something else. The objects of sabotage in this case are Schiller's notion of the "play" and equally important, the "aesthetic."

For both Schiller and Spivak, the practice of "play" provides the possibility to address the polarities such as body/mind, rationality/emotion, passive/active. Both agree that this play, and hence, the training of the capability to play, is crucial for any aesthetic education. However, they differ tremendously from each other when it comes to the function they assign to "play" in society, and what this play entails. Schiller identifies the aesthetic education of play as the core engagement in experiencing true beauty and, resulting from this, true freedom. For Spivak, play is the training of the imagination (in order to "play the double bind," to "unlearn one's privilege," to "let the subaltern speak") with the aim to address and contest the injustices of globalization due to the dominant logic of capital and conditions of coloniality. For Spivak, training the imagination is about activating transcontextual situations. She demands one work at the limits of the abstract *and* the concrete at once. Through this one may play the "double binds" of one's worlds and change these.

The question still remains as to how Spivak imagines playing the double bind. She does not really work out what actually happens between or at the two ends, or the two poles of the double bind. She approaches this question by excluding how one should rather not imagine it. It is certainly not, she explains, Schiller's way of playing that mistakenly "solves" the double bind by "turn[ing] it into a series of balances" (*ibid*., 16). Denial is not a solution either,

which entails short-term single-binding that emphasizes "a single pole of the swing of the double bind" (*ibid.*, 18). The term "swing" is also problematic, because it suggests again a movement or oscillation between the poles, one by one. The danger of these terms (balances, denial, swing) lies in a quick fix and therefore might prevent any further imagination around the topic. Spivak herself also uses the phrase "inhabiting the two ends of the pole" (*ibid.*, 4), which comes close to Donna Haraway's "holding on to both poles of the dichotomy" (1988, 590). This resonance brings about Haraway's feminist practice of "situated knowledges" as an alternative to traditional models of scientific objectivity (see "Afterword: Unlearning as a Scaffolding for Living" on pages 233–35 in this book). Haraway contests the idea of the researcher as an impartial and disinterested onlooker who "discovers" the truth about the phenomena being studied. However, relativism is not an option for her either. In order to dispose of the false binary of relativism and objectivity, Haraway demands getting rid of what relativism and totalization have in common, namely the "god tricks." According to Haraway "god tricks" are illusions "promising vision from everywhere and nowhere, equally and fully" (*ibid.*, 584). These "god tricks" are exercised through claims of objectivity (vision from nowhere), and claims of relativism (vision from everywhere). Haraway dismisses both and describes the feminist paradox as follows:

> how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own "semiotic technologies" for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a "real" world, one which can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness (*ibid.*, 579).

She suggests practicing "situated knowledges" to both practice (scientific) truth-claims/objectivity *and* simultaneously keep open the possibility for different "truths." With "situated knowledges" she combines a critique of (scientific) knowledge practices with a commitment to the possibility of knowing differently.

What links Spivak's and Haraway's approaches is their demand to hold on to the two ends of the dichotomy. To relate this back to unlearning: What Spivak and Haraway suggest as working and thinking of both polarities

at once, I have learned to identify as paradox, or as impossibility. Instead, unlearning one's privileges as a relentless working and thinking through of one's history, prejudices, and assumptions, as well as perceiving perception attempt to hold the possible and impossible, to be body and mind, at once.

These practices also connect to Haraway's "situated knowledges," and learning to play a double bind, as they foreclose a too easy hunt, and lazy solutions, yet are committed to intervening in the world. In other words, juxtaposing playing the double bind and situated knowledges reminds me of a clearly defined goal, namely generating in the here and now "knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination" (Haraway 1988, 585).

Spivak's use of Schiller's play has a yet further goal. Her intervention is about "productively undoing another legacy of European Enlightenment—the aesthetic" (2012, 1), which for her is infused with Schiller's understanding of aesthetic education. Spivak calls this intervention "ab-use" (not abuse). By activating the meaning of the Latin prefix "ab" as "below," but also "motion away," "agency," "support," as well as "the duties of slaves" (*ibid*., 4), Spivak juxtaposes it with what for her is the "upbeat post-colonial task" (*ibid*., 27), namely "ab-using" European Enlightenment in the sense of "affirmative sabotage." She points to the intricate and difficult undertaking, when she writes "Enlightenment came, to colonizer and colonized alike, through colonialism, to support a destructive 'free trade', and that top-down policy breaches of Enlightenment principles are more rule than exception" (*ibid*., 4). Spivak attempts to intervene in the coloniality of aesthetic education, and here specifically in Schiller's legacy, with the goal of undoing its premises and false promises. She considers a reworked aesthetic education that will not only enable us to *know* the contradictions of a globalized world. Rather, aesthetic education *trains the imagination* for playing the contradictions (not solving them) in the fight against injustices in a globalized world.

What is the role of the aesthetic here? And how does Spivak's sabotage of the aesthetic succeed, or not? Aesthetics, broadly understood as the study of perception, and historically of taste and beauty, is a term and practice that is intricately interwoven with European Enlightenment thought. Schiller wrote *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* in 1795 and responded to the disenchantment that he felt about the French Revolution. His main concern in the text is how art and beauty are related to freedom, and by that, he extrapolates

Immanuel Kant's exposition on aesthetic judgment. For Schiller, no liberation from tyranny and oppression is possible without a successful aesthetic education that is able to provide a sense of beauty. Strikingly, he writes about this correlation while fully ignoring radical demands for freedom at that time, such as the demands for abolition of slavery (e.g., in the French empire), or women as a driving force of the French Revolution. Schiller's promise consists of changing human beings in the long run through aesthetic education with the assumption that this will *then* automatically (or intrinsically) produce social change. His thoughts have extensively shaped up until today what is known as aesthetic education in the Western world and excel in a stunning career in schools since the nineteenth century.

In the last decade, Schiller's proposition of aesthetic education and its widely reaching scope of how to imagine social change has undergone deep criticism, Spivak's among them. Philosopher Ruth Sonderegger criticizes Schiller, firstly for his naive assumption that art easily forms the character of a person, secondly for his demand of lifelong aesthetic education that postpones social change in the interest of some utopian realm, and thirdly for a narrow understanding and exclusionary coloniality of art in the singular.[14]

While Spivak highlights (does she affirm it?) "what all projects of 'education' do, a need to establish a distinction from a homogeneous 'animality'" (2012, 8), and problematizes Schiller's "injunction to feminize the aesthetic" (*ibid.*, 33), she does not pay much attention to the coloniality of Schiller's (and Kant's) account of the aesthetic. Sonderegger and literary scholar David Lloyd,[15] share the sense that Schiller's proposition of aesthetic education has far too long been overlooked in its relation to questions of race and the civilizing logic of European colonialism. As Lloyd tells us, the aforementioned deferral fuels "[t]he pedagogical aims of the aesthetic that Schiller will draw out into a program of education, transforming the 'raw man' into the citizen. [...] Within such a pedagogy, the developmental history that separates the 'Savage' from the modern subject is spelled out more fully than it is in Kant's exposition, and the terms of the racializing judgment of culture are established in ways that are decisive for [...] a liberal discourse of colonialism" (2019, 59).

14 For a detailed discussion of Kant and Schiller on the aesthetic and aesthetic education see Sonderegger 2010, 23–37, and *ibid.* 2023, 73–94.

15 Thank you to Valentina Desideri who introduced David Lloyd's work during a workshop in 2019 within the Master of Fine Art at HKU University of the Arts Utrecht.

My point in bringing up Schiller here, is that this meanwhile widely influential and institutionalized understanding of aesthetic education in Western institutions has inscribed itself into the relationship between art, social change, and institutions. Schiller's aesthetic education is pivotal to an underlying theory of change that I deem as colonial. Scholars of education and social justice Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang understand a theory of change as referring "to a belief or perspective about how a situation can be adjusted, corrected, or improved" (2014, 13). Schiller's aesthetic education is a colonial theory of change because it operates its ideological function and legitimization through the socio-psychological logic of human progressive development. "This task" of forming the "raw man" into the citizen, as Lloyd explains, "is not merely assigned to the aesthetic but first envisaged in it" (2019, 10). In other words, this civilizing logic takes its force from a seemingly intrinsic connection between aesthetic experience and education, while art and artistic practices ride in the slipstream. As a colonial theory of change it places the Western world (and in it some more than others) and its modern ideology at the horizon and origin of societal evolution. The aesthetic becomes an exclusionary technology of change that needs to be taken seriously in a triple sense. Its colonial-civilizing logic, firstly, draws a clear boundary toward the colonial other; secondly, it marks a demarcation within the Western world toward lower classes and between genders; thirdly, we should not forget that today, in Western societies, discussions around aesthetic education and the arts are heavily tied up with what scholar of education Rubén Gaztambide-Fernandez calls the "rhetoric of effects" (2013). On the one hand, there is an obsession with the desired and to be proven impact of the arts on things like academic achievement and other societal outcomes. On the other hand, as Gaztambide-Fernandez in detail elaborates, when there is trouble with proving any impact, intrinsic arguments are put forward, focusing "on those aspects of learning that are supposedly inherent to the arts, such as aesthetic experience." Typical remarks would be that the arts don't have to do and prove anything. "They are their own good." And by that inevitably "reinscribing notions of the arts for arts' sake" (*ibid.*, 220). This tendency can also be increasingly read in accreditation reports, on art academy websites and in justifications for the relevance of art education on an (inter)national level, as an "expressionist" legitimization of art and its didactics (see also Biesta 2017). The role of art and its pedagogy is evoked as

primarily enabling adolescents and young adults to express themselves and develop their own language. As Gaztambide-Fernandez unfolds, the discussions around arts for art's sake very often conceal "how the concept of the arts is mobilized to justify exclusion through notions of talent and artistic ability that typically ignore or downplay the role of social context in determining who is included and, by extension, excluded" (*ibid.*, 223). It is here where a discourse around arts for art's sake meets the aesthetic as a colonial theory of change. Schiller explicitly states the civilizing force of the aesthetic through experiencing "true beauty" that then works as a socio-psychological force, important for those who society regards as "underdeveloped" people not quite ready for self-determination. In comparison the notion of arts for art's sake works with a similar logic (e.g., with regard to artistic talent), however, it has to hide this very "function [...] that reanimates a particular conception of what it means to be a 'good' and 'moral' human being" (*ibid.*, 221). To put it in different words, the concept of the aesthetic (including its derivative as arts for art's sake, and for self-expression) has been constituted as a technology for othering, exclusivity, and based on superiority. These concepts and their material consequences have inscribed the ongoing modern-colonial project in Western institutions, and shape how artistic practices and aesthetic education relate to education, theories of change, and enduring forms of coloniality.[16] Turning the aesthetic, and by extension aesthetic education and the arts, into a structural location is a task for unlearning. This involves both unpacking these categories discursively, and intervening in their doings on the artistic, educational, admin-organizational, and personal levels in an art academy (see also the conversation with Ferdiansyah Thajib on pages 23–39 in this book). Studying their *doings* in the entanglement with sociopolitical, material lives, emphasizes relationalities and connections to worlds that they/we are embedded in.

This inspires the sites for unlearning, namely the investigation together with actors (in institutions) into how to *unlearn* what is given to us through the legacy of modernity. The university or academy, the school, the museum, my personal environment, and the art organization Casco are institutional arenas in which to work for other relationalities within the worlds I am living.

16 The influence of Schiller's aesthetic education has a magnitude that is further continued in European policies on lifelong learning to which I turn in Krauss 2018, 74–92.

The sites for unlearning attempt to engage with the double take without falling into paralyzed suspension. Crucial to the sites for unlearning and their structural intervention is that we overcome the frustrations of an impossible task. With a sharp attention toward what I call routines of the impossible, the sites for unlearning investigate the impact binaries have on our ways of engaging with impossibilities. This also includes affective structures that are interwoven with imagining differently the way we investigate or study together. To approach what *appears* like an impossible task—unlearning aesthetic education as a colonial theory of change—deals crucially with finding out about (dominant) habits of thinking and behaving, and here more concretely, which binaries are produced as an effect of institutional settings, parameters, and philosophical legacies. The doings of the aesthetic with its colonial legacy is one of these habits. These legacies get (re-)enacted and sustained through living, working, and learning situations and enter our thinking and behaving to form a state of routines—routines of the impossible. This term is important as well when approaching the binary of structure and practice that I have conjured in the last paragraphs and in this book. Through holding on to both poles of the binary, with the term *routines of the impossible* I attempt to take "structure" seriously,

> not through an ontological difference that is separated from action and practice, rather acknowledge structure as a specific form of practice. More concretely, the term structure very often prevents us from analysing what constitutes stability, permanence, that which seems not available. When we talk about structure, we actually render anonymous certain processes, that are actually specific practices, and that are actively generated by entangled conditions and reproduced through specific actors (Demirovic 2015, 282).[17]

To study and intervene in these routines of the impossible is for me a foremost task for the sites for unlearning.

Unlearning Schiller's aesthetic education and its derivatives sounds like such an impossible task. Is it though? Or, is it a habit that has been long enough repeated, so it is deemed quasi-natural? How to intervene in this habit? I propose breaking with the two attributions of the aesthetic at the

17 My translation.

same time, both its developmental, individualizing, socio-psychological attribution and its stand-alone characteristic. Instead, I propose to turn the aesthetic into a structural (historical, affective, political, discursive) location.[18] This means to study it as "a materially, and always raced/gendered/classed/sexualized category around which social institutions are constituted, disciplinary sciences created, and legal apparatuses mounted" (Tuck and Yang 2014, 4). In other words, I propose deconstructing the category of aesthetic including its contextual realities and acknowledging and studying its implications for identity and social life at the core of the double approach (double bind) for unlearning. From this perspective the aesthetic is not only a study of perception (taste and beauty), but is a term that captures bodily experience, something that is absent in Spivak's writing. To support this move, I'd like to bring in again the decolonial scholarship on aesthetics of Vázquez Melken (2020). As a reminder, Vázquez Melken carves out how the aesthetic regime of modernity has not only inscribed itself in our Western ways of representing the world, but as importantly in the very ways of how we experience and perceive the world. This has consequences for practices of unlearning that address and struggle with habits of thinking and doing, namely I also need to include habits of experiencing and perceiving my environment and relationships.

The Relation between Habits and Binaries

What is the relation between the routines and habits that I fall back into when engaging with an impossible task and the binaries with which I get entangled? Spivak explores "habits" of thinking and doing with regard to philosophical argumentation and critique, investigating the term "habit" in Bateson's and Antonio Gramsci's writing. According to Bateson, a habit is a "hard programmed" routine (1972, 279) that is repeated regularly and tends to work partly beyond consciousness. Habitual behavior often goes unnoticed because the person does not need to engage in self-analysis when following particular routines. Bateson argues that we tend to not only exhibit

18 I owe the proposition of this shift to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in *Youth Resistance Research and Theories of Change* (2014) who lift the category of "youth" out of their developmental character.

a particular habit in a particular situation, but as a form of problem solving for "whole classes of problems" (*ibid.*, 279). Instead of trying to engage with the specificity of each problem or situation we face, we exhibit the same habit in order to solve a whole range of problems. Spivak is not satisfied, from an epistemological perspective, with Bateson's exploration of habit. She proposes that Bateson, who is interested in the psychological aspect of habits, falls short of a deeper exploration into the epistemological dimension of a habit. He points to it, Spivak contends, but criticizes that he does not follow up when he writes: "the economy consists precisely in not re-examining or rediscovering the premises of habit every time the habit is used. We may say that these premises are partly 'unconscious', or—if you please—a habit of not examining them is developed" (*ibid.*).

For Spivak, what is crucial in habit formation is exactly what is missing in it: "a habit does not question" (2012, 8). This means that habits lack the critical capacity to interrogate themselves. She draws on Gramsci who is interested in the prospect of democratic education and links it to the possibilities of developing "new habits" (Gramsci 1971, 298). A democratic education necessarily demands that "the premises of an argument must indeed be 'rediscoverable', 're-examinable', by the man of the masses as he is educated to be a citizen" (Gramsci 2000, 318). However, Spivak claims that it is not enough that an argument's premise is re-examined, which is a common and necessary scientific and academic exercise. She demands another effort within the "training of the imagination" that in the best case entails a certain "aesthetic" that "*short-circuits* the task of shaking up this habit of not examining them [the premises]" (Spivak 2012, 6). Putting forth that the previously discussed aesthetic education has entered the state of a habitually formed double bind itself, Spivak suggests that philosophical—I add rational—argumentation is rather powerless when it comes to intervening in habits of thinking, doing, and experiencing. In order to intervene in habits, she demands producing an "aesthetic short-circuit" (*ibid.*, 6). As pointed out, I interpret this as studying and intervening in routines of the impossible (including aesthetic education itself).

I'd like to extend the thoughts around habits to stereotypes and incorporated knowledges. Whereas *habit* functions as a concept in the realm of practice theory, the term stereotyping is primarily used in theories of representation. Stereotypes are understood here as expectations and beliefs

about the characteristics of members of a group, wherein the group is prioritized over differences among the members (Andermahr et al. 1997, 263). Work by British cultural studies (for example, Stuart Hall 2013) has been influential in both unravelling deep-seated racial stereotyping in popular culture, and questioning boundaries between art and everyday aesthetics. What links stereotypes as simplified, under-complex forms of representation, and habits as repetitive, often unnoticed ways of doing and experiencing is their carelessness toward the particularity of a setting.[19] While I do not want to underestimate the necessity of the importance of routines and habits in life, my focus lies in the effects of their inability to match the messiness of the world in which we live, and the complexities of who we are.

Habits as Incorporated Knowledge

And lastly, let's draw attention to habits as forms of incorporated knowledge. For Spivak, the training of imagination to intervene in the injustices of a globalized world (as a formation in which "aesthetic education" plays a role) takes place in her scholarly field—literary studies. She weaves together literature, literacy, and political intervention, making the case for literature as a place for the impossible, and suggesting that the training of the imagination "can only be figured in the ethical experience of the impossible. And literature, as a play of figures, can give us access to this experience" (Spivak 2012, 352).

Here lies a certain predicament that I touch upon in the "Afterword" (see pages 223–37) and I return to in the contribution on *Hidden Curriculum* (see pages 156ff): the force of bodily knowledge. In my opinion, Spivak does not pay sufficient attention to bodily knowledge. As an example, I draw on Gramsci, who is an important interlocutor for Spivak. Gramsci investigates

19 These elaborations extend into the digital world and algorithms, which, according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, are finite sequences of instructions used to solve a class of specific problems and are used in large-scale data processing. The algorithm's capacity to work on big data, is paired with its inability to work with ambiguity. Again, the grouping of problems is prioritized above their particularities. In this sense, algorithms seem to include both characteristics of stereotypes and habit formation in quite an excessive way. See also Krauss, Thajib, and Hummel, "Feeling Numbers," 2021, www.feministsearchtools.nl.

scholarly reading and the bodily-disciplining capacities of the work-table, asking: "Would a scholar at the age of forty be able to sit for sixteen hours on end at his work-table if he had not, as a child, compulsorily, through mechanical coercion, acquired the appropriate psycho-physical habits?" (1971, 37). Learning to read over a long time and being immersed in texts is a capacity of scholars that implies the discipline of the body and results in the routinized behavior of studying. Thus, Bateson's "hard-programmed routines" are always also bodily routines. Engaging in literary studies presupposes the acquisition of such a psycho-physical habit. Relating this to "aesthetic short-circuiting," this practice necessarily needs to include the physical dimension of habit formation in the complexity of human lives. Moreover, I am drawn to the term "short-circuit" and its capacity to evoke the idea of an intervention, and a force of disturbance by traveling unintended paths, and bringing electrical poles to a maximum closeness. However, the term might as well be misleading in its indicative temporality of short-term acceleration, and abruptness within a closed system. Instead, a "hard-programmed routine," or "psycho-physical habit" are engendered over a long time and constitute a multilevel phenomenon, as described before. Intervening in such multilevel phenomena, a short-circuit may play a role, but will it be significant for a transformation on the long run? Most likely habitual processes will be roused, but the probability of falling back into or continuing the habits afterward is big.

What if these habits rather resemble a form of addiction? Bateson conjures this connection himself, when he juxtaposes the thoughts on habits and double bind with the "logics of alcoholic addiction," and more importantly with his elaboration on the "strenuous spiritual regime whereby the organization Alcoholics Anonymous is able to counteract the addiction" (Bateson 1972, 315). In short, Bateson draws out how the addiction to alcohol is not a single-leveled relationship between the drinker and "the bottle," but the result of a highly complex relationship between individuals, their "self," and the systems of which they are part. This complex arrangement is not prone to a quick fix, and rather needs to consider change or transformation on multiple levels, namely the relationship between people, how people regard their "self" (e.g., in relation to values, social order, individual perception, body-mind, more-than-human, to name a few), and how they see both in relation to the worldly systems and processes with which they contend.

Although I am aware of the rather individualizing tendencies that are implied in Bateson's approach to addiction, I bring this up because developing a working definition of unlearning needs to include an attention to a certain form of endurance and mettle to intervene in the force of habits and routines in their multileveled complexity. A short-circuit might play a role in it, but another temporality seems as important, namely that of enduring as in keeping the attention over a long time, staying with, withstanding, persisting.

Moreover, Gramsci's work-table indicates that investigating habits has to include the question of who can afford to have which habits. Of course, Spivak is not oblivious to the question of who her addressees are when she insists on literary studies and literacy, but approaches this from another perspective. In her (academic) life she addresses both students of the humanities at institutions like Columbia University, New York and students in schools of rural West Bengal (who she tries to reach though her Memorial Literacy Project). Motivated by what she calls "education for everyone" (2012, 122), it involves people in the countryside in India who are most likely not born into an environment that allows them to acquire psycho-physical habits for future study at a recognized university. The question of who is addressed is a necessary one to consider when approaching forms of domination in concepts of unlearning. For example, the *Hidden Curriculum* project takes efforts to transgress academic and artistic boundaries by placing the collaborative research within secondary schools, while other parts of the research on unlearning have stayed within artistic-academic contexts. I attempt to work in both contexts and to investigate their impact at various levels. These projects are experiments with what playing the double bind and practicing situated knowledges can mean and do physically, conceptually, and practically for approaching processes of unlearning.

By way of ending this text, let me sketch out several items. These highlight certain aspects, insights, paradoxes, and outlooks that have emerged through writing this particular section in relation to the attempt at approaching practices of unlearning.

Practicing Unlearning in Four More Ways

Unlearning as Inhabiting Spaces of the Impossible

Spivak persistently demands investigating how, as a researcher, one produces and narrates truths. At the same time, she urges the acknowledgement that this endeavor will hardly be successful, because personal experience and desires are naturalized into the "truths" and their investigations—a double bind. This deconstructive stance resonates with Haraway's claim for partial knowledge and her accounts for a critical positioning. Both Spivak and Haraway encourage research, but also advise to work through the conditions of research and its entanglements with socialpolitical, colonial structures in their always remaining incompleteness. In other words, I need to fight against the conditions of the place that I *must* inhabit. Moreover, Spivak's unlearning one's privileges is not solely referring to research practices, but encompasses relationships on an everyday basis. In both instances unlearning my privileges necessarily involves that I work through the ignorance that is produced through my privilege, while I acknowledge that this production neither stops, nor can be entirely grasped. Spivak inspires a perspective on unlearning that is crucial for what is brought forward in this book, namely transgressing one's own (research) environment and inhabiting spaces of the impossible on an everyday basis. In this vein, unlearning becomes a scaffolding for living.

Codeterminancy of Learning and Unlearning

What emerged during the sites for unlearning is the proposition to actively practice the codeterminancy of learning and unlearning. Spivak's conceptualization of the double bind encourages this move. The experimental settings of the sites for unlearning constitute the framework and capacity to both study un/learning in already existing articulations and practice unlearning collaboratively in differently initiated forms. To intervene in the accumulative and progress-oriented concepts of learning that are bent on exploitation and domination is one of the tasks of performing the inextricable codeterminancy of learning and unlearning. The double take on the world with its dedication toward the "concrete" *and* the "abstract" guides the experiments with the aim to intervene in prevailing conditions of coloniality today.

The Physicality of Unlearning

A double bind depicts our globalized present that is full of contradictions, inconsistencies, and injustices. For Spivak, playing the double bind is learning to "live with contradictory instructions" (2012, 3, 16) where aesthetic education provides the framework to "train the imagination for epistemological performance" (*ibid*., 122). Whereas she locates imaginative practices in the humanities, especially literature, philosophy, and literacy, she hardly gives any consideration to what could be called the physicality of imagination, or the physicality of aesthetic education. Studying the bodily-affective registers including habits of thinking, doing, and experiencing, the sites for unlearning attend to bodily knowledge and the routines of the impossible that are inscribed in our bodies. When we unlearn, we unlearn as bodies.

Unlearning Aesthetic Education as Prevailing Conditions of Coloniality

Schiller's programmatic writings about aesthetic education have widely influenced how change is envisaged through aesthetic education in Western educational institutions, e.g., in the relationship between art, social change, and institutions. As an undercurrent, the function of aesthetic education is conceived as a catalyst for the development from the uncivilized to civilized with the promise to reach full freedom. As a disciplinary strategy (for the ruling class back then), the aesthetic has not only fulfilled a crucial pedagogical function to form the good citizen, but also a racializing concept of development and progress has been substantiated. Since then these mechanisms have inscribed themselves meticulously in policies, institution building, and artistic practices. The practice of unlearning (in this text) is dedicated to lifting the category of "aesthetic" out of its developmental and stand-alone (arts for arts' sake) habitual attribution, and study it as an always material/raced/gendered/classed/sexualized category that has implications for identity and social life, and how we experience the world—hence the concept of aesthetic that captures bodily experiences.

Unlearning understood as becoming aware, attending, and getting rid of taken for granted routines of thinking, doing, and experiencing, I highlight the term "attending" as bodies and as a composite of keeping the attention and enduring unlearning in order to meddle with routines of the impossible.

Bodies to Think With

An earlier version of this scene is published in Laure Prouvost, *This Means Love* (London and Eindhoven: Lisson Gallery and Van Abbemuseum, 2021).

I had already sensed it a few times. If I say a few times, I should probably clarify I sensed it a hundred, a thousand times in different parts of my body: somewhere near my elbows, down by my ankles, but also in the upper left leg of a passerby, several toes of the woman sitting in front of me, an armpit of a security guard. I sensed it in this crowd of people, their cheeks, bums, backs. (And believe me, it was not easy to get used to.)

When did I start paying attention to this feeling? Not an easy question. To be honest there was some suspicion involved early on... Would "sensing" be the right word for it? Does this sound familiar to you, dear reader?

Frankly speaking, I can hardly recall how unimaginable it was to think — now that it is provisionally called "thinking" again — that I don't only think with or in or through my head. Rather, there are bodies to think with. How am I connected to you, and how do you think through me, them, us, and the other way around?

Between "now" and "then" lie pretty much 40 years — but also 400 years. Forty years ago, I was caught paying attention, which is next to nothing in relation to all those years of colonial rule. And more importantly, how did it happen in the first place that we — descendants of what used to be called Western institutions — came to think and believe so stubbornly that our heads and minds would provide the place for thinking?

Several of us are dedicated to tracing the different stories that have so aggressively shaped our bodies and ways of living. And now, at this very moment, I think, sense, reconnect again: above my right knee I sense, and at the second rib in their chest.

Maybe some of you still remember the time when whole classrooms were structured in a way that privileged the head to think. The tables would split our bodies in two halves: an upper part, which was visible, above the table and the rest of the body tucked away beneath the table. The chairs would comfortably support these moments of mechanical coercion. We would then continue carrying out this psycho-physical work upon our bodies in daily life. We would direct small gestures toward our heads that subtly persuaded us: this is how life has to be. Not many would seriously question the visions around our thinking-heads that are written into our bodies, for they have been normalized and sustained by histories of thought. These visions inflicted violent consequences on people's lives.

Does the way we think determine the way we sit? Moreover, does the way we sit shape our bodies and our thoughts?

While there may not be easy answers, a notable twist occurred when several of us realized that some thoughts were generated under the table.

Hidden Curriculum

An earlier version of this text is published in *Medienimpulse* (Krauss 2015) and Krauss 2017. For many of the students' contributions, see the project website *Hidden Curriculum*, 2007–present, www.hidden-curriculum.info.

How might high school students understand, engage with, and ultimately investigate a "hidden curriculum" (everything learned in the context of specific everyday school environments next to official curricula)? The art project *Hidden Curriculum* (HC) (2007–present) responds to this question with a series of 10 workshops since 2007 realized with students aged 13 to 23 in Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom. HC claims that knowledge is not only reproduced in schoolbooks and passed on to subsequent generations through the official canon, but is generated by unintended, unrecognized, even undesired values, unofficial abilities, and know-how. Students learn to depend on authority, feel the pressure to perform, and observe standardized thinking and role models without necessarily noticing these constructs are being taught. Yet these forms of knowledge, those not generally fixed in school materials (at least not explicitly), are structural components of the daily school system.

HC looks at the coping practices students develop to deal with the subordination, hierarchies, and silent violence implicit in these hidden curricula, as well as student actions that challenge enforced cultural values and attitudes (e.g., punctuality, tidiness).

In the workshops, students comment on conventions and unwritten rules in their direct environment and develop ideas together that respond to what a hidden curriculum *means* and *does* using performance, intervention, drawing, discussions, and interview formats. The thinking by doing approaches attempt to situate hidden curricula within students' own schools and encourage investigation of those surroundings and sociopolitical structures that engender the practices that happen within them.

Practicing unlearning is informed by my ongoing work on learning theories and practices. My main question has been what kind of models of learning permeate research, teaching, and institutional practices, and how they find ways into how social change is imagined, without necessarily being aware of it. Here specifically, I look at the collaborative investigation of informal and formal learning practices in secondary schools—through the HC project. Following an outline of the HC project, I detail the underlining pedagogical and critical feminist theory in order to address hierarchies of knowledge and the physicality of education in institutional frameworks. Both have been critical in approaching the process of unlearning and the ways we relate to each other.

Fig. 1 *Chair Hierarchies*, 2013, video still (St Paul's Way Trust School, London). Courtesy *Hidden Curriculum / In Search of the Missing Lessons*, London

Hierarchies of Knowledge

Several trajectories have surfaced during HC, two of which I dive into here: first, what is considered legitimate knowledge, in secondary school education; and second, the physicality of education and its relevance to un/learning processes. I begin with HC findings in the form of stills from student-produced videos that situate the students' proposals and practices, with analyses that introduce particular approaches, discussions, and questions by different groups of students toward a hidden curriculum.[1]

Fig. 1: Student Ruksana Bhanu distinguishes types of school chairs by who uses them: the comfortable, spinning ones are reserved for teachers, while students use the static and smaller chairs. She notes that I sat on a "student chair" when I introduced the project, and self-confidently grabbed a spinning chair at the next session—a gesture that the student herself would not dare to do at her school. My use of the spinning chair and the ensuing discussion around it became part of the investigation and to the students

1 See project acknowledgements on pages 135–37 in this book.

indicated that I entitle myself, as all other teachers, to use these chairs. She continued to explain that I seemed to have a similar position to teachers in the realm of the school. Bhanu extended her research to many other everyday school objects. By identifying and thoroughly describing moments of hierarchies, domination, and subtle gestures linked to objects and who uses them in which contexts, Bhanu shows how these moments are determined by, and at the same time frozen in, school objects and form a daily part of her experience of power. Bhanu's investigation — as with other students — influenced the discussion of the HC project and positions involved, specifically my own. Her address of my privilege in using a teacher's chair without being aware, and my implicatedness in enacting a hierarchical relationship in school on a micro level, offered not only a way for me to work through my automatic reactions toward objects and their wider context. It also provided an example for the student group of how a beginning is made to rework one's assumptions, and the collective-individual effort it entails.

Fig. 2: What are written and unwritten rules for you in school? In response, students Bouchompoo Cook, Evin Alaa Hussein, Laila Al Rida, and Kitry Seydou of the Quintin Kynaston School in London produced a video about how they cope with the everyday requirement to wear uniforms, beginning with a discussion in the girls' restroom on how they bypass the rigid rules of wearing them. Cook rolls up the hem of her skirt to make it look shorter and her friend advises wearing "really cool" short pants under the skirt that can be shown by tucking up the skirt when the teachers were not around. The students extend their investigations and interview boys who similarly reveal an attentiveness to their uniforms and explain subtle modifications. Both groups are very critical of the uniforms, titling the video: *School Uniforms Are Never Cool* (2012). The category *cool* can in their view hardly be attained by any school uniform. Despite contestation, the students find ways to discuss implicit social rules attached to the uniform. They acknowledge a certain relevance in wearing them to avoid fashion branding and clothing competition between the students. Rida points out that subverting the clothing protocol (for example, making the skirt look shorter) could also be seen as adhering to the social norms of a particular fashion. The students also note the implementation and expression of social status and hierarchies through the uniform itself. To untrained eyes, these uniforms all look the same, but the subtleties of more expensive, precious fabrics do not escape the students'

Fig. 2 *School Uniforms Are Never Cool*, 2012, video still, students from Quintin Kynaston School, London. Courtesy *Hidden Curriculum / (In)Visibilities*, London

Fig. 3 *Collectively Rocking Chairs*, 2013, video still, students from St Pauls Way Trust School, London. Courtesy *Hidden Curriculum / In Search of the Missing Lessons*, London

attention and form a distinct layer of social hierarchy in their everyday life that is hardly addressed at school. Their knowledge about school uniforms is extensive and untaught, and far exceeds my limited understanding of the associated politics. The students investigated a hidden curriculum that exists in these practices that are not explicit or addressed in coursework, showing a sophisticated understanding of school life.

Fig. 3: The group developed the exercise *Collectively Rocking Chairs* (2013) to look into how group conversations take place in their lessons and analyze their organization. As some had already been studying school furniture (see fig. 1) and were trying to redefine their use or function, the exercise merged both investigations. By reusing a normally individual practice of rocking chairs forbidden in school, the students' collective exercise commented on the norms of group discussions in school and instigated many further discussions among students, teachers, and myself invited to join. Putting a group discussion out of balance triggered reflections among participants concerning mutual trust and body language during school discussions. Some teachers expressed a sense of disbelief in the function of the exercise and were hesitant to allow the chairs to rock. Most of the invited participants did not dare to join because we did not have enough trust in each other's capability to support each other (as many of them voiced). However, once we engaged in the exercise, it sparked many exciting discussions that related to the questions of how we work with one another and what the unwritten rules in these relationships are. *Collectively Rocking Chairs* addressed a hidden curriculum of implicit norms and unwritten rules and allowed students and teachers to physically consider how they relate to each other spatially and bodily during group discussions in class. The students also were able to investigate what forms of trust different discussions need or presuppose and how this exercise as compared to other forms of discussion relates to individuality and collectivity.

In the context of this writing, I am particularly interested in these proposals in which groups of students investigate certain aspects of a hidden curriculum as they relate to what is regarded as (legitimate) knowledge, and what is not recognized as knowledge at all by students, staff, and myself in school. These other unrecognized forms of knowledge are contained within everyday school routines as a force the HC project sets out to collectively investigate. In their comments on unintended, unrecognized, or undesired knowledge, students investigated forms of authority and privilege

(*Chair Hierarchies*, 2013), and how they learn to compare themselves with others, compete, and distrust each other, including a discussion on abled and not so abled bodies in everyday life in school (*Collectively Rocking Chairs*). They discussed how they learn to anticipate what teachers want to hear and see or how far they can go in order to pursue their own interests during their everyday lives in school (*School Uniforms Are Never Cool*). In this sense, research into hidden curricula crucially deals with the relations between power, knowledge, people, objects, classroom, control, and society, and how they are institutionalized in school. Investigating in a specific group how we relate to each other through what we regard as learning (formally and informally), and how these relationships are produced, sustained, and reshaped, has been the departure point for the sites for unlearning.

Setting the Framework

Over the years conditions emerged for the HC framework of workshops, in negotiation with school principles, administration, students and teachers, and collaborating art spaces. A key condition for schools was that workshops with the students take place during regular classes, and not as most schools proposed as an afterschool activity. Ideally, we held regular meetings each week for no less than two or three hours, making sure not to take up only art class time as was repeatedly suggested by the school, but to be included in other subjects such as math, languages, and history and address hidden curricula in subjects besides art. Teachers could then consider the project and time within other subjects dedicated to HC next to art. Holding workshops outside regular school hours as schools frequently suggested would have conflicted with the project's aim to investigate hidden curricula during school, requiring instead that they run parallel to or as part of other subjects.

For commissioning art organizations, HC attempts to stipulate the project run not within their educational programs, but as an integral part of the "main" art programs, while positioning the project as also educational seems self-evident and is appreciated by art organizations and myself alike. To consider HC as an artistic project in the "main" program was often encountered with doubts and questions about its "real" artistic character. Moreover, interlocutors in art spaces would argue that acquiring funding

for HC as part of the educational program would not only be easier, but would provide spillover money for the main program. My request became a regular entry point for discussions on the boundaries of what is regarded as art, and the socio-economical aspects of educational projects in art organizations in Western Europe. These discussions were embedded in what is meanwhile commonly described as the "educational turn" in art. Interdisciplinary researcher Susannah Haslam names these discourse-heavy programs (re)presented in artistic productions "a two-fold phenomenon of artistic and institutional practice" (2018, 15).[2] In the early 2000s when these programs were getting underway, art education researcher Carmen Mörsch carried out extensive research in this area, particularly the British funding model's impact on art and education discourse. She notes that the policy measure "Value for Money" initiated by the Thatcher government in 1980s UK that spread throughout the European cultural sector happened when increased funding possibilities and high visitor numbers became connected to establishing educational programs. This contributed further to economizing the cultural sector and creating an excess in evaluation reports and assessment strategies (Mörsch 2004, 61–70).

The entanglement of socio-economic processes and knowledge production in school and art practice within these organizational frameworks became crucial to HC, and figure prominently here to echo the significance of these discussions at the start of each workshop series with institutional stakeholders. At the same time (and not least through the attention that the educational turn generated) HC tried to contribute to the debates around institutional critique in art, here understood as the artistic inquiry into the workings of art institutions. With an attempt to break open the hermetic discussions of institutional critique within the arts, HC reconnects to institutional interventions in other fields, joining art *and* educational practices dedicated to the collective investigation of conditions of power (O'Neill and Wilson 2010; Mörsch 2019; Sternfeld 2009). On the one hand, the educational turn opened up an exclusive understanding of art; on the other, it facilitated

2 See also Rogoff 2008; O'Neill and Wilson 2010; and a renewed perspective in Spieker and Holert 2022.

3 Writer and art critic Marina Vishmidt describes the idea of human capital as "essentially that of applying cost:benefit analysis to 'intangibles' such as education, family, health or cultural interests and viewing them as rational investments made by individuals in their employability, social mobility and financial security" (2012a, 42). See also Krauss 2018, 74–92.

the alliance between art production, institutional reform, and financialization of education and art, which perpetuates the logic of human capital.[3] The HC participants—students, schools, art organizations, and myself—touch upon these aspects and study the project's claims, context, conditions, and histories that co-constitute the presence of hidden curricula in institutions.

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Studies on Hidden Curriculum in the Field of Education

The title *Hidden Curriculum* is borrowed from the field of education, an important point of reference throughout. The debates about hidden curriculum studies within education that date back to the 1960s were opened up by Henry Giroux in the 1980s who pointed to their intersection with critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is understood here as approaches to teaching and learning that engage anyone involved, to analyze and question forms of oppression, power relations, and privilege, and empower to speak out against social injustices. In *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition*, Giroux defines the hidden curriculum as those "unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted tacitly to students through social relations and routines that characterize day-to-day school experience" (1983, 45). In accordance with this definition, educational theorists since the 1960s, mentioned hereafter, agree that education means more than providing students with instructional goals and objectives. However, they differ significantly in analyzing why, how, and under which premises students in school

experience these unstated norms, values, and beliefs. Giroux's four (historical) approaches—traditional, liberal, radical, and dialectical perspective (*ibid.*, 42–113)—deal with the phenomenon of a hidden curriculum and have significantly influenced further educational studies (Margolis 2001; Marsh 1997; Kentli 2009). I summarize and use Giroux's understandings of a hidden curriculum to examine the social questions addressed and their underlying assumptions.

The *traditional approach* can be ascribed to theoretical studies that interpret society as an unquestioned state that school needs to prepare us for (Giroux, 48), embracing the assumption that education maintains existing order. A proponent of this approach, Philip W. Jackson, generally credited with having introduced the term hidden curriculum to educational studies in his book *A Life in Classrooms* (1968), identified social relations in public school classroom life in addition to official curricula. "School might be called a preparation for life. Power might be abused in school as elsewhere, but its existence is a fact of life to which we must adapt" (Jackson 1968, 12). In focusing on the type and transfer of knowledge within schools, how students receive knowledge from teachers who receive it from state institutions that represent society, Jackson observes that the hidden curriculum has a positive function in transmitting school norms, conventions, and belief systems that lead to consensus and stability within existing social structures. This highly conservative attitude toward existing hierarchical relationships between teachers and students and between schools and the larger society has led to criticism of Jackson's understanding of the hidden curriculum. While he stressed its force in striving for conformity in the classroom, he is oblivious, if not openly supportive as to the political significance of education (and as a part of it a hidden curriculum) in sustaining hegemonic interests and injustices in society, in relation to class, gender, or race inequalities (*ibid.*, 52–53).

The *liberal approach* focuses on how dominant interests get legitimized in school. It locates the hidden curriculum in specific social and cultural practices in the classroom that reinforce discrimination and prejudice, thereby asking "the question of how meaning gets produced in the classroom" (*ibid.*, 50). Supporters of this approach have examined the socially constructed nature of classroom situations and identified authorities and truth claims that are taken for granted. Jean Anyon, for instance, who studied fifth-grade classrooms in the United States, compared in "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work" (1980) two working class, one middle class, one upper

middle class school, and an elite school, noting: "Differing curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices emphasize different cognitive and behavioral skills in each social setting and thus contribute to the development in the children of certain potential relationships to physical and symbolic capital, to authority, and to the process of work" (Anyon 1980, 90). Anyon's insights into how the hidden curriculum reproduces economic and social class structures reveals the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion from knowledge, and intentional and unintentional physical, evaluatory, pedagogical, and interpersonal exclusions from curricula, which produce hierarchies. As important as this approach is, the underlying assumption within it—that the hidden curriculum is produced merely within the classroom—ignores the social, political, and economic conditions of society outside the school building that "create either directly or indirectly some of the oppressive features of schooling" (Giroux 1983, 55). For the liberal approach, the hidden curriculum seems to exist due to uninformed educators or lack of materials. By focusing on these deficits, the approach suggests that the hidden curriculum could be eliminated by simply providing different knowledge, which does not take into account that knowledge itself is a site of struggle infused by the truth claims and power struggles of the society in which it is embedded.

In the *radical approach*, theorists replace the consensus-driven traditional approach with a focus on conflict. The liberal approach emphasizes generating meaning by students and teachers in the classroom, juxtaposed with a focus on wider social structures. Influenced by Marxist theory, advocates of the radical approach criticize schools for serving capitalist structures and the state. Consequently, they look into the schools' embeddedness in an economically driven society: "Schools are not agents of social mobility but reproduce the existing class structure. They send a silent, but powerful message to students with regard to their intellectual ability, personal traits, and the appropriate occupational choice, ... which takes place through the hidden curriculum" (Bowles and Gintis 1976, 31). The quote from the most influential examination of this field, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (1976) by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, a book grounded in political economy, is key to the Marxist theory of sociology of education. Bowles and Gintis regard schools as instruments to transfer and legitimize the reproduction of inequalities and domination. In what they term the *correspondence thesis*, they investigate how schools are

internally organized with respect to the capitalistic workforce through its structures, norms, and values. For Bowles and Gintis, the hidden curriculum has to be seen as the process of instilling these behaviors and norms through the normalizing, everyday features of school life. Their approach differs from the traditional perspective and ties in with the liberal approach in its argument against the seeming neutrality of school. They explain that what appears on the surface as a necessary and neutral process of social reproduction in fact serves the demands of more powerful institutions and dominant social groups. My main criticism of the radical approach is firstly its focus on class relation in which race and gender remain unaddressed. Secondly, the approach has been criticized for its pessimistic structuralism that positions people as passive recipients in the economic social system and therefore in knowledge processes.

Giroux's own approach, the *dialectical critique* (Giroux 1983, 59), acknowledges the different inquiries within the diverse field of hidden curriculum studies, while criticizing them for cutting relationships between schooling, capitalism, and knowledge production within and outside the classroom. Giroux reformulates the term hidden curriculum by including these relationships and reclaims their value as an important theoretical-practical element in critical pedagogy. Giroux does not understand school simply as a place where students are organized, instructed, and controlled by the interests of a dominant class. For him students are not passive containers for storing information—they creatively act in ways that often contradict expected norms and dispositions. These contradictions or small acts of resistance might open up spaces for students and teachers to critically reflect upon and resist mechanisms of social control and domination. Ultimately, education, including the hidden curriculum, has to be seen as being politically able to create alternative cultural forms.

My understanding of the hidden curriculum resonates with Giroux's that criticizes the positivism of the *traditional approach* conforming to the hierarchies of knowledge in society by using schooling. The *liberal approach* contests these hierarchies, but exhibits a one-sided social constructivism that supposedly eliminates classroom hierarchies. My understanding of hidden curricula differs from the *radical approach* and its sole focus on class hierarchies and reductive structuralism. Giroux's method connects the critical features of the previous approaches in a multidimensional one sensitive to race, class, and gender. Furthermore, I add the diagnostic character that a

study of hidden curricula might bring about. Robin D. G. Kelley explains this by stating that "[e]veryday acts of resistance can be understood as diagnostic... They are telling what people desire, what causes pain, they are trouble spots, where people are confused. [...] [A]cts of resistance are revelatory, revealing things about social relationships and power" (Kelley 2014, 87).

While appreciating Giroux's work, I have two comments: one is semantic and the second concerns the field of educational studies and who is regarded a legitimate researcher. Like the other approaches, Giroux uses the direct article when talking about *the* hidden curriculum. I propose, shifting to *a* hidden curriculum implies that there is not merely one to direct these social inquiries toward, neither is there one homogenizing understanding of a hidden curriculum. Following Donna Haraway's *situated knowledges*, and the historicity of a specific knowledge claim, I look to strengthen the situatedness of any hidden curriculum with regard to its context, conditions, materialities, and agents.

The HC set-up does not only situate itself in the school context and its hierarchies, but it also attempts to address the hidden curriculum studies in academia. The studies discussed previously have been undertaken by academic researchers who decide what would be important to address in relation to research on hidden curricula in education. The dimension of what research on a hidden curriculum would look like from the perspective of those directly involved (students, teachers) remains unaddressed. This produces a distance between those who have the power to investigate a hidden curriculum in school, and those who might receive information about it, running the danger of objectifying the students and their situation in school. Already the writing of this very text *about* the HC project and the proposals by the students tends toward such an attitude. It is an explicit tension that I acknowledge. Students can claim their (non-)identification with the HC set-up and their own research and contribute to establishing archival frameworks.[4] This text, however, addresses also an academic public, mediating the project's redefinition of what knowledge and critical pedagogy engagements entail as

4 Throughout the years, many of the proposals, findings, and practices by the students have materialized into an archive of short videos, audio sequences, and photos that have become an extensive collection of material due to the engagement of different student groups during the different workshop series. As developed and negotiated by different students and student groups the archive is partly public and partly secret.

an artistic, collaborative intervention in the secondary school system, in academic research, and the hierarchies of knowledge related to hidden curricula in these areas. Following this path, a hidden curriculum is then an object of study and a tool to address unexamined assumptions in discourse, practices, and materials shaping school experiences. This study is not only confined to academic research, but becomes part of an educational framework for students and teachers alike. As Giroux reminds us, this research "has to be grounded in values of social justice and personal dignity" (1983, 61), looking at both the domination *and* contestation that marks everyday lives at school. He further cautions that contestation has to be seen as contradictory in itself, since it might challenge and reiterate existent power dynamics and "tend to be reproductive" (*ibid*., 120). Consequently, a study of hidden curricula must concern reproduction *and* transformation, as the students discuss in *School Uniforms Are Never Cool*, troubling their own subversion of the uniform with the idea that they might adopt other fashion norms, exposing it as a tool for both equality and inequality.

Relating Feminist and Critical Pedagogies to the HC Project

Giroux's multidimensional approach resonates with bell hooks's contribution to feminist, critical pedagogy. Although hooks did not explicitly frame her writings on teaching and classroom experiences in relation to hidden curricula, many aspects have structured the HC project. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks unfolds an intersectional definition of feminism, noting: "[R]ace and class oppression should be recognized as feminist issues with as much relevance as sexism" (1984, 25). Forms of domination infuse society and therefore also education, not only in questions of gender and sex. hooks urges us to examine the "inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression" (*ibid*., 31) and "our role in their maintenance and perpetuation" (1983, 25–26). What hooks insistently addresses since the 1980s is the limitation of gender or class as a single-issue analysis. Power relationships, she indicates, cannot solely concern gender inequalities, or class, but have to address other inequalities in their interrelatedness (hooks 1984, 31).[5]

The exercise *Collectively Rocking Chairs* (fig. 3) highlights several aspects of this. After one workshop session in which the students involved

the wider school community, a teacher, who had decided not to participate, explained to me that this was because the school had problems with some of the female students in the workshop not taking study seriously and the exercise was another example of this. He added that he found it hard to read the students and related this to them being situated within Bengali communities in London, raising questions about gender and ethnicity. The male students from the same communities, he said, were particularly receptive to the attitude of the female students, which only increased their enthusiasm for what he termed a nonsensical exercise—a recurring issue in the HC project when the students' playful ideas and pleasure in certain exercises clashed with dominant expectations of what serious study entails. The situation provoked quite some tensions given students did not shy away from scrutinizing the exercise as a comment on how classroom conversations are held, and how these affect trust among them. I addressed the teacher on his latent sexist and culturalizing remarks with regard to the female students, without much response.

Convinced of the practical-theoretical dimensions of the exercise and the pleasure of exploring them, other teachers introduced it in their classes. Students and teachers would discuss its relevance to classroom conversations and worked with each other practically and theoretically. The exercise entered many workshop sessions in very different contexts, too, through which collaborations and their spatial arrangements were discussed.[6] *Collectively Rocking Chairs* has been a great example of how an HC exercise can intervene in the everyday life of school and challenge taken-for-granted set-ups. Last but not least, the exercise enabled staying connected for some time with student groups, by feeding back the afterlife of the exercises in other settings.

hooks identifies the production of pedagogic pleasure as an important element to feminist politics in the classroom (1994, 7). Literary scholars Lena Wånggren and Karin Sellberg compellingly elaborate on this difference from other critical pedagogies that lack the notion of pleasure in classroom situations (2012, 542–55). Although hooks (and Wånggren and Sellberg) refers specifically to academic classrooms, I consider the notion of pleasure crucial for secondary schools' everyday life as well. Not only can the classroom be

5 For more on intersectionality, see pages 103–06 of "Instead of Solving Paradoxes and Contradictions" in this book.

6 See, e.g., *Off-balancing Chairs*, in *Unlearning Exercises* (Krauss in Allen et al. 2018, 24–26).

exciting, but this "excitement can co-exist with and even stimulate serious intellectual and/or academic engagement" (hooks 1994, 7). Regarding the lack of interest and apathy that dominate stories and feelings about the classroom experience, hooks regards the pleasure of teaching and learning indeed as an "act of resistance" in complex classroom situations (*ibid.*, 10).

In *Teaching to Transgress* hooks further elaborates on what she calls an "engaged pedagogy," "a way of teaching that anyone can learn," which should not be limited to enabling different kinds of learning for different students. Most importantly, teaching has to be organized to include the teacher as someone who learns in the classroom also. And this includes secondary school and university classrooms alike. This kind of learning has to strive toward reciprocity (*ibid.*, 11, 61) and mutuality (*ibid.,* 14). hooks is convinced that "education can only be liberating when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labour" (*ibid.,* 14). She understands education as an ongoing recognition that everyone influences and contributes to the classroom dynamic (*ibid.,* 8). Education needs to engage many and diverse teachers and students to consider ideas, issues, and suggestions of reciprocity. In this way the classroom may provide "a location of possibility" where we can "collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress" (*ibid.*, 207).

From the outset, the HC project aimed to develop a framework together *with students*. Yet, as discussed before, classroom situations are imbued with social hierarchies and imperatives for and between students and teachers, and addressing collaboration as a reciprocal engagement in learning and the problematics that surround it is necessary. By linking the question of *what* with *who* investigates the hidden curricula and *how*, I try to remain attentive to the danger of obscuring authorities or hierarchies, by locating the production of knowledge in the social hierarchies in which we are entangled. The continuous struggle of collaboration cannot circumvent conflict, but find a way to hold tensions, and cope with it. It has been the work by hooks (and here especially also her anticolonial pedagogy) and other Black feminists whose insistence on bracing oneself for "obstacle, conflict and pain in a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (*ibid.*, 26) has inspired me till today. Disagreement and conflict have been a major challenge in the HC project—as it has been in *Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given*, and the Sites for Unlearning.[7] To find ways together of how to relate, to hold the tension and not evade it, these practices attempt to acknowledge power positions, and

the differences especially also present in everyday situations. For example, in *Chair Hierarchies* (fig. 1) as discussed earlier, Ruksana Bhanu addressed my role in reinscribing hierarchies by using a specific chair, a school object, prompting us to consider what was needed for the people involved to address, to listen, to trust, to rework. *Chair Hierarchies* reminded us of our mutual investment in this project, and that I can learn as much from the students as they might learn from me or the project set-up.

Engaging in HC over the years, I have found great inspiration in activist, educational, artistic, grassroots, and para-institutional initiatives in which cultural practitioners, "locals,"[8] workers, and scholars collaborate in studying the complex conditions, contexts, and transactions of living, learning, and working in their very different specific contexts. Early examples that I closely followed, and helped me to develop a position in this, were Askan Alwan, Beirut; Center for Possible Studies, London; Center for Urban Pedagogy, New York; Chimurenga, Pan-African; Chto Delat, Petersburg; KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, Yogyakarta; maiz, Linz; Metronome Press, Paris; Raqs Media Collective, New Dehli; Silent University, London/Stockholm/Hamburg; Ultra-Red, UK/US just to name a few. All these initiatives manifest very differently in terms of scale, economy, ways of working, purpose, visibility. Yet, their work, either directly and indirectly related to education, is dedicated to spaces of organizing in which political dynamics are opened up, and where the process of organizing itself is activated as context-specific learning and experience. This is certainly also part of what has meanwhile become popular under the term "study,"[9] as a mode of practice that "can function as both a mode of artistic and knowledge production as well as an exercise of self and group organization reflecting on the ethical, class and power configurations of its conditions" (Graham 2016). Not surprisingly many of these initiatives have also drawn on methods, methodologies, and discursive frameworks of feminist, anticolonial and critical pedagogies among which have been hooks, Giroux, and Paulo Freire who I turn to now.

7 See "Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)" on pages 41–74 in this book, and Allan et al. 2018.

8 With "locals" I point toward both those whose lives and specific work takes place to a great extend in a specific geographical place, and those who are locals to a specific context, such as a particular institution (aka the students/teachers/employees/workers of a particular school, or a university, hospital, factory, etc.)

9 See the elaborations on Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's "study" in *Unlearning Exercises* (2018, 197–98).

hooks's feminist, engaged pedagogy and Giroux's dialectic critique share a critical and antiracist approach that challenges a hegemonic canon, both grounded in the work of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire fighting illiteracy in Brazil. In "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970) he develops his understanding of critical pedagogy as a political struggle for justice and equality by forming critical consciousness—the ability to read the sociopolitical structures of one's context and consequently to fight against the injustice within these. According to Freire, students and teachers have to become aware of the politics imbricated in education as this is never (politically) neutral. Freire's contestation of educational neutrality echoes Pierre Bourdieu's studies on education. Since the 1960s/1970s Bourdieu has argued that schools institutionalize dominant *cultural capital* through the meanings and rules that constitute the day-to-day workings of classroom experience. In his writings, cultural capital refers to those systems of meanings, linguistic, and social competencies, and elements of style, manner, taste, and dispositions that the dominant class permeates society with as being the most legitimate. Social capital is an important part of Bourdieu's theorizing of *habitus* (1977, 53–65)—namely these types of incorporations that form the political identity of our bodies activated through subtle everyday routines of thinking and doing.[10] While appearing to be neutral, schooling reproduces the unequal distribution of cultural capital (and habitus).

According to Bourdieu, the most important and, in relation to school, most effective part of the cultural heritage, the disinterested education and language, is transmitted in an osmotic way without any methodical effort and influence. This reinforces the conviction of the members of the class with the most cultural capital, that those forms of knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes that have never been perceived as results of learning processes, are solely owed to their "natural talents" (Bourdieu 2001, 31). Whereas Freire provides useful insights and practices when working with disadvantaged groups and the working class in Brazil where he developed his literacy programs, Bourdieu's theories enable us to understand the middle and upper class in Western European societies. According to sociologist Beverly Skeggs, Bourdieu offers tools to identify "authorization, exchange and use of

10 For a further discussion of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, habitus, and schooling see Giroux 1983, 188–90; see also pages 156ff and 223ff in this book.

distinction. [...] He can show how the bourgeois perspective is implemented, how interests are protected and pursued and how authorization occurs" (2004, 30). This is especially helpful when trying to identify mechanisms of exclusion within school education and the moments of learning that are unvoiced in the classroom.

On the struggle around neutrality in schooling processes, I return to the student-teacher relation, one of the most contested relationships in schooling to which Freire, hooks, and Giroux dedicate a lot of attention. Freire famously criticized traditional educational systems for their *banking* concept of education in which the student is an empty container that can be filled by the teacher, which "transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative powers" (1970, 77). In this model, Freire identifies the teacher as the active subject and the students as passive objects: teachers, as the ones who are supposed to know, are the epistemological authority in this system; students' pre-existing knowledge is ignored, apart from what was expected to be *deposited* into them earlier. The banking paradigm relegates students to being "adaptable, manageable beings. ... The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them" (*ibid*., 60). Naturalizing the teacher-student relation in terms of who has and provides knowledge and who does not, fixes structures of authority in school. Instead, Freire positions students as active participants in educational processes, such that learning is no longer a process of one-way transmission of knowledge from those who know to others who need. Rather, the relation between teacher and student becomes mutual, which, nevertheless, does not mean the sharing of knowledge happens in the same way. Knowledge is not something a person *has*, but something that has to be *engaged with* from all sides within education. Hence, an active and mutual relationship is never entirely controllable, and explains why Freire, hooks, and Giroux refuse an entirely oppressive structuralism and pessimism toward school. This relation has to be seen as a process not ruled only by structural necessities, but which bears the potential for contestation and ideally provides a platform for *teaching to transgress*.

There is a slightly different yet comparable articulation of critical pedagogy in Jacques Rancière's famous statement that "the most important quality of a schoolmaster is the virtue of ignorance" (2010, 1). In his book

The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation, Rancière criticizes common education in which the teacher thinks he or she knows exactly which steps have to be taken and which examples are easy enough for the acquisition of knowledge. This is very similar to Freire's critique of education. Whereas Freire, hooks, and Giroux focus on the passivity of students, Rancière looks at how knowledge (re)produces an authoritarian distance between teachers and students. This authority does not only exist in the difference of knowledge, but also in the power of the teacher to define the distance between student and teacher, and hence institutes a hierarchical relationship of knowledge. Rancière introduces the historical case of Joseph Jacotot, a French teacher in the early nineteenth century exiled to Belgium, as a counter to these supposedly given relations of superiority and inferiority that amount to "enforced stultification" (1991, 7). As a professor in Louvain, Jacotot had to teach French without being able to speak Flemish. He decided to use his own ignorance as a teaching method. Without any explanation, he gave his students a French text to read along with its Flemish translation, which had several implications. First, he brought two languages into relation with each other without explanation. Second, he removed himself from the center of the classroom as the one who would normally transmit knowledge. To his surprise, the experiment worked well. The students learnt French and crucially, developed their own methods of learning, relating the two texts in a way that would best help their learning processes.

What is important here is not the teacher's knowledge, but the active delineation and use of ignorance to establish a different way of relating as the center of the educational process. This *practice of equality* is what Rancière regards as the important moment of emancipatory education. Equality is practiced here as starting point rather than destination. Wånggren and Sellberg link Rancière's, Freire's, and hooks's engagement with pedagogy by suggesting that "the 'ignorance' of the teacher is pivotal in a classroom dynamic that emphasizes the importance both of redefining 'knowledge' and of mutual classroom engagement" (2012, 546). Moreover, this form of ignorance is not to be confused with the one we can learn about in the discourse on white innocence and racism. By following Charles W. Mills's epistemology of ignorance (2007), Gloria Wekker (2016, 17) describes ignorance as one of the main traits in the claims of innocence. While the "not-knowing" is certainly present in both descriptions of ignorance, Wekker's description includes a

distinct "not-wanting-to-know," which is detrimental to classroom practices. Instead, I understand Rancière's ignorance as striving for delineating what I, as a teacher, do not know, in order to then find out *together* with the students—an explicit "wanting-to-know" that includes the students.

It is a form of decentering oneself as a teacher in the classroom that has consequences for the way students' positions are understood and related to, but also for how knowledge is conceptualized in the classroom. It supports an understanding of knowledge that is not treated as an external body of information whose production appears to be independent of particular human beings. Knowledge cannot then be regarded as neutral as it is the result of a human activity *situated* in human norms and interests. This relates back to the elaborations on hidden curriculum that emerged from the interaction between sociopolitical and economic conditions of schooling (inside and outside it) and a student's specific learning situation at a certain place and time. It is not necessarily I as teacher, artist, or researcher who would know about it, but the students themselves who are able to find out. Following Rancière, I address three critical elements in acknowledging ignorance with respect to a collaborative investigation and experiment around hidden curricula. Key to this experiment on ignorance is interrogating the premises that affirm roles and maintain hierarchical relations in the project.

In the following I discuss some of the reactions of involved teachers, and students, in relation to the framework and conditions of the HC project important for collaborative research in an attempt to challenge processes of thinking and doing. Some teachers were quite doubtful and voiced critique in the sense that my attitude was irresponsible, considering that I wanted to work together with young people and "did not know what to do." Some demanded a clear step-by-step plan, had problems with a student-led structure, and requested a defined outcome—a tangible product as security for everyone involved. The teachers were not only touching upon the reproduction of an authority structure by eliminating porosity in the student-teacher relationship, but they were also preoccupied with eliminating unforeseeable situations in educational settings. This provoked tensions, since the set-up included openings for uncertainty and instability toward deliberately not knowing. In regular educational settings this is seen as risk—intellectual, but also social and practical. It runs counter to the predictable outcomes in the structuring of school lessons, and school life in general. The school structure

and the acting participants in it aim for stability and certainty in predictable outcomes. In *Teaching to Transgress* hooks demands from engaged pedagogy that instructors face their deep fears about "loss of control of the classroom" (1994, 34). This is not surprising since the "prevailing pedagogical model [is] authoritarian, hierarchical in a coercive and often dominating way, where the voice of the professor is the privileged transmitter of knowledge" (85).

With students, the approach of not knowing sometimes led to tensions in the student workshop groups as well, especially when we tried to figure out how to continue certain processes. We had to come to terms with the fact that there was neither an infallible, secure way of proceeding, nor a clear outcome. Some of the students approached me with a somewhat angry sense of impatience that I should finally tell them what a hidden curriculum really was. It was understandable that the students turned to me, since I brought the questions and the project to them. However, they seemed to not take seriously my declared ignorance about it or did not know how to cope with it. Many students conceived our discussions as "one of these strange student-teacher games"[11] in which a teacher asks a question although she already knows the answer, but acts as if she doesn't in order to motivate the student. The students recalled these experiences when teachers obscured their position of the knowledgeable as a motivation to ask certain questions. These *as-if-ignorance* (as I call them) reinstate in a forceful way the hierarchies between those who are supposed to know and those who are not. There is a danger of internalizing the as-if-ignorance and interpreting situations for them to be fulfilled. hooks describes these kinds of situations also in terms of students resisting their responsibility to engage in classroom situations, "since the vast majority of students learn through conservative, traditional educational practices and concern themselves only with the presence of the professor" (*ibid.*, 8). She instead encourages students (and sets the framework accordingly) to turn away from the teacher's voice and presence, and to listen to each other.

The hierarchies of who is allowed to know and who is not are reiterated between students themselves. In many situations, especially at the beginning of the workshops, the students tried to reinstate my role as the project explainer when they had to make decisions on, for example, what they should dive deeper into, or where to go in the building to proceed with some ideas.

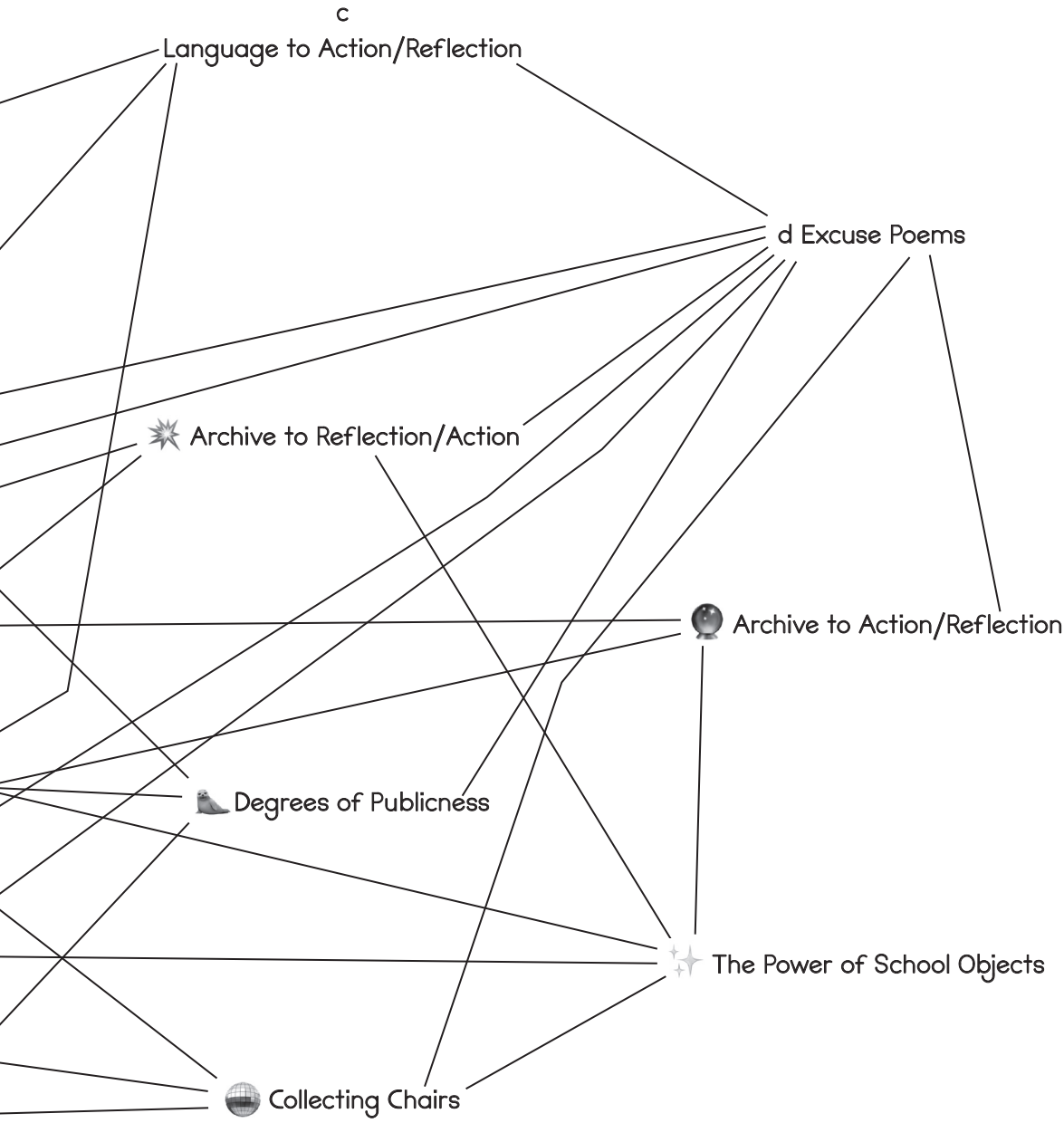
11 Conversation during HC workshop, Utrecht 2007.

When trying to force me to decide was somehow thwarted, students posed questions to their own group: Who is speaking? Who is entitled to speak? And who, they assume, has the knowledge to explain? These produced quite some tensions between students, and not the least between students and me.

My role in the HC project, and the group dynamics changed a lot depending on location. In school students frequently addressed me as an artist or—as one put it—"different from the teachers." Another student pointed out that the reason for this could be that the project allowed them to climb up on cupboards, as opposed to having their teachers try to get them off them. During the project I became aware of many moments like this that would come to define their perception of my role within school. This included the way the students sat on the tables when we met, or how we used mobile phones in the building in order to organize ourselves during the sessions. In school, I inhabited the role of the "ignorant" artist more easily, since I did not know the environment, processes, and routines. When the students went to art spaces involved (for example, Casco, Utrecht; The Showroom, London; or Whitechapel Gallery, London), I increasingly adopted the role of an instructor or tutor. The students were entering an environment they were not used to and looked to me for guidance on how to relate to it.

Working within such different kinds of (power) structures is challenging, since I am part of them if I want it or not. I try to find ways to question them, interrogate the premises that affirm certain roles, and at best start a process of renegotiation. By *trying* to reduce my role as an authority figure, I see how implicated I am in its reproduction, simply by entering the institution of a school or an art space. Within the workshops we tried to find out how the students' ideas can become constitutive of what ends up happening there. This corresponds with how I understand Rancière's "practices of equality" as a collaborative process. It does not mean that inequality can be diminished or eliminated by taking a radical position and hoping the rest follows. Rather, as Marina Vishmidt commented in a conversation around the HC project: "It's a contingent process of experimentation in the social field that posits equality as a desire that can be actualized, and then figures out how, and why it fails when it does" (Krauss, Pethick, and Vishmidt 2008, 34).

Hidden Curriculum Exercises



This map features various methods, suggestions, and ideas developed during the Hidden Curriculum (HC) project between participants and Annette Krauss. It gives insights into the many threads and interrelations that make up the collective study of a hidden curriculum in school. An earlier version of the map was developed as a wall drawing for the City of Women Festival, Ljubljana 2021.

2* Chair Exercise

At school, tables and chairs are the pieces of furniture that are used on a regular basis by everyone. Students are asked to interact with a school chair in a way that differs from how they usually use it.

3 Investigating the School Building

The chair exercise is expanded to encompass the whole school building. The students set off to explore the building and find ways to approach it that differ from how they usually navigate it. The students exchange on which spaces they find, which interactions they try out instead. The students further seek gaps within the building, finding verbal language and documentation for these "in-betweens" or "non-spaces," that are, e.g., not used, inconvenient, uncomfortable, forbidden, or hidden.

4 Sharing Tricks

What would the equivalent of these in-between or non-spaces be as an action (or in everyday life)? The students are invited to reflect upon what they have done during the workshop and relate it to their actions elsewhere. The students can access the HC Archive: an archive of tricks and daily practices in which students from other schools share some secrets or coping mechanisms from their daily lives at school. As many of these videos have been made in other countries, they set off a discussion about differences in school systems, in particular between what is allowed or not allowed in schools in other countries. The students contribute their own story, image, or video clip to the HC Archive.

5 Tricks to Actions

The HC Archive is a starting point for a brainstorming session in which the students develop their own ideas about how to transfer these tricks into other actions. The purpose of this is for the students to find their own particular fields of interest that raise questions about the broader topic of their exploration: hidden curriculum. In small groups the students develop their own study project within this framework. These range from interviewing the janitor to get to know his views on what goes on in the school, accessing all forbidden rooms, to sitting in on a test in the year below and observing the dynamics, energy, and practices during it.

6 Performative Situations

The students find ways to intervene in everyday processes at school. These actions include switching lockers, riding a bike through the different floors of the school building, and moving all the plants in the building to block a corridor. By placing obstacles impeding the ways people usually move around the school building, these actions prompt teachers, other staff members, and other students to reconsider their habits.

7 Public Actions

The students move their explorations into public space, looking for ways to counter the normal flows of the city and study the ways that public space is regulated, attempting to test it by making slight changes to the "curriculum." For example, what happens if someone is waiting for the bus standing upside down? What could the distances between people in public indicate?

b Language Exercise

The students are asked to find synonyms, translations, or collocations for the words "hidden" and "curriculum." They present the terms to the whole group and come up with a new composite term, suggesting a specific perspective on hidden curriculum, such as: undercover study ... secret agenda ... unknown plan ... mysterious rules ... invisible lessons ... out-of-view system ... Some of the new terms not only guide the study groups, but also inspire the retitling of the workshop series. Every HC workshop has its own additional title such as Operational Disorder ... May We Disturb You? ... In Search of the Missing Lessons ... (In)Visibilities ... Beyond Common Sense ...

c Language to Action/Reflection

Some students understand the term "hidden curriculum" literally as hiding spaces in school. They set off to visit these spaces and share them with each other. On their quest, they find many more spaces that give subtle readings of a hidden curriculum with regard to the school building, such as unused spaces, or forbidden, unnoticed, inconvenient, and inaccessible ones.

d Excuse Poems

Students recurringly study excuses in school. They are guided by the questions: In which situations are excuses used in school? Why are they used, and which forms do they take? And what is the relation

between excuses and existing norms and conventions? How do excuses (invented or not) subvert, but also affirm rules in school? Students collect excuses and create the so-called Excuse Poems.

Archive to Reflection/Action

A substantial amount of time in the HC workshops is dedicated to the study of the findings of previous workshop participants. This way, the students learn about the approaches of earlier participants and get inspired by their work. The material also sets off discussions about differences and similarities in school structures, in particular, between what is allowed or not allowed in schools in other countries, what everyday life in other schools looks like, and what coping mechanisms, tricks, and secret actions are used there.

Archive to Action/Reflection

In some HC workshops, participants archive ideas and suggestions for the next school to try out. A few groups of students took up one of these suggestions, such as the idea of playing "hide and seek" with video cameras inside the school. They develop their own interpretation of the idea.

Degrees of Publicness

Early on in the HC project, we had discussions with groups of students about the publicness of certain contributions that they made. The discussion addressed, e.g., the sensitivity of certain videos, such as those featuring secret actions and tricks that were not yet known to teachers. We agreed to review all the contributions created in the course of the HC workshops from the point of view of their accessibility, asking how public each contribution should be. This led to the following specifications. The contributions: a) are only shared within the current workshop group; b) can be shared with future workshop participants; c) can be shared with a wider public.

The degrees of publicness are most visible in the "tricks and secret actions." Whereas a whole series of numbered contributions between #1 and #44 in which students share their actions, are accessible, some contributions (and some titles) are missing and not shared with the public. These contributions remain secret.

The Power of School Objects

The students are asked to expand the study of (re)using school objects like chairs and tables by exploring power structures. Students develop their own exercises, such as Collectively Rocking Chairs. By reusing what is usually an individualized practice that is forbidden in school, namely rocking chairs, the students' collective exercise comments on the norms and conventions of group discussions in school. Literally upsetting the balance of a group discussion, the students trigger reflections on mutual trust, power relations at roundtable discussions, and body language during school discussions.

Collecting Chairs

For the presentation of the findings of the HC workshops, each student is asked to borrow a chair from their home. The chairs are collected from their homes and assembled in the space of presentation (school, art, or community space). The individual choices of the students creates an odd array of different kinds of seating in relation to the school furniture presented in the space. Visiting family members often refer to the furniture as a further motivation for their passing by.

* How would we relate to each other, think, live, and work with each other if we started counting from two instead of one, not pretending that we know where and how things start, when our selves are always already two, if not multiple ...?

The Physicality of Education

Since the first workshop series in 2007 students showed a strong interest in using performative strategies and body-related interventions as a thinking by doing process. These research methods became extremely important to the project, as they address the role of the body in schooling situations, implicit hierarchies, and questions of governance. Or, to put it differently, the circumstances yielded an orientation toward the physicality of education, namely the participants' practico-physical interaction with their immediate material and discursive environments.

Fig. 4: Students and I interacted with school chairs in a way that went against our usual use of these objects. The students documented our findings. The so-called *Chairs Exercise* (2012) is a practice in how the physicality of education has been approached in the HC project.

Fig. 5: Students set off to investigate the school building, finding ways to approach it that differed from habitual ways they had navigated it. They tried to gain information about the different spaces, using no tools except their bodies—measuring with the width of their arms or the length of their bodies. Taking the title of the project as a proposal, they looked for hiding spaces, and eventually sought out gaps within the building that were unused, inconvenient, uncomfortable, forbidden, and hidden spaces. They later called these *In Between Spaces* (2007). They physically entered into these spaces and documented their findings.

Fig. 4 *Chairs Exercise*, 2012, photos, students from Quintin Kynaston School, London. Courtesy *Hidden Curriculum / (In)Visibilities*, London

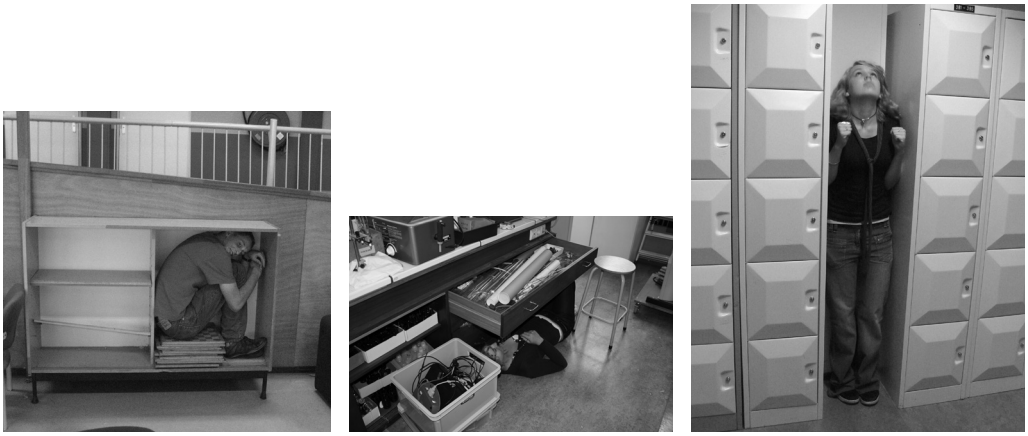


Fig. 5 *In-Between Spaces*, 2007, photos, students from Gerrit Rietveld College and Amadeus Lyceum, Utrecht. Courtesy *Hidden Curriculum*, Utrecht

An important aspect of the HC project has been that the students get to know each other's methods, approaches, and findings. This forms an important thread of discussion and exchange within the project and between different groups of participants and schools across places and times. In this sense both proposals (fig. 4 and 5) are linked to *Collectively Rocking Chairs* (fig. 3) and *Chair Hierarchies* (fig. 1), and emerged from many discussions and actions revolving around the use of chairs in school. The students investigated how they sat and how to a large extent this is due to implicit codes in everyday practices rather than intentional choice. In one session, a group of students discussed the relations between chair, table, and body: "When sitting at a table our legs just fit underneath it. Nobody pays attention to the space under the desk, neither me, nor the teachers. That's really irrelevant. What is important in school are the books, the papers on the table, our hands and head. That's the way school makes us sit at the table."[12] In the everyday experience of school, both the space under the desk and the students' bodies including their legs go unacknowledged. The way of sitting renders the body part seemingly irrelevant for school, invisible. However, it is especially these parts of the furniture and the body that became interesting for the students as a part of a hidden curriculum at school. The students

12 Written down during a workshop session, Utrecht, 2008. My translation.

extended these investigations to the whole school building. By investigating their daily routines in walking, standing, and using different parts of the building, they became aware of the building and tried to find parts, which they did not use, or had not thought to use (fig. 5). The students made space in school tangible, drawing attention to a hidden level of complicity between spatial arrangements, bodies, and daily routines of behaving and thinking. The preoccupation of schooling with mental processes reflected back on the students' description of how the spatial settings in school emphasize the upper part of the body (especially heads and hands), whereas the rest of the body stays unnoticed and hidden under the table.

Working with implicit regulatory activities in the context of school recalls Michel Foucault's well-known concept of the human body's capacity for "docility" (1977, 136), which refers to the acquisition of social abilities that are not biologically given, but which are learned. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault describes how by the end of the seventeenth century, forms of discipline were directed at the individual subject in the context of prisons, schools, and hospitals. The aim was to optimize the powers of the individual body, specifically its usefulness. According to Foucault, the production of a docile body, a useful body, not only involves direct bodily regulations in the form of punishment—important too are "tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms" that he calls "disciplines" (222). In comparing school with a "learning machine" (147), Foucault collects the tiny everyday forces that control and condition bodies in school, such as spatial distribution in the form of cellular arrangements (classrooms, tables, benches, and chairs) or temporal distributions in the form of rhythms produced through timetables. Through these disciplines the subject both gradually internalizes externally imposed control and at the same time these disciplines socialize an individual as a subject.

Foucault addresses the relation between externally imposed control mechanisms and internalization processes through the principle of visibility that he sees as productive in many areas in society, particularly clear in his use of the panopticon. The panopticon is designed as a circular building with an observation tower in the center of a space surrounded by a wall of prisoner cells. The inmates can be seen at any point, whereas the guards in the tower remain invisible. In the words of Foucault, "disciplinary power is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time, it imposes on those

whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility" (*ibid*., 187). Through the invisibility of the guards, the inmates direct the prison guards' gaze back at themselves, and submit themselves to the social order of the prison. This mechanism is important because it de-individualizes and automatizes power structures. Power is not so much to be found in a person any longer, but "in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (*ibid*., 202).

These insights have been formative for theories on subject formation in post-structuralist feminism (Braidotti 1994; Butler 1993). Accordingly, power cannot be solely understood on the basis of domination, as something that is possessed and deployed by individuals. Power is understood as a strategic relation of forces that infuses life and produces new forms of desires, relations, objects, and discourses (Foucault 1983, 212). Moreover, the subject, Foucault argues, does not precede power relations, but rather is produced through these relations. Central to his formulation is what he calls the concept and paradox of *subjectivation*: the very processes that enforce a subject's subordination to and correlation with certain norms, are the conditions through which they become a self-conscious identity and agent (208–25). Foucault's understanding of power is important for educational settings, because it discourages us from conceptualizing the students and teachers as blank pages for social inscription or omnipotent masters of educational processes.

Foucault's understanding of power does not reside in *either* subordination *or* resistance and freedom, but rather tries to move beyond this binary construction through *both* subordination *and* resistance. This resonates with the both/and in Giroux's hidden curriculum studies as well as in hooks's feminist pedagogies. Each claim that classroom situations have to be understood as *both* reproduction *and* transformation (hooks 1994, 207; Giroux 1983, 61).

Back to the students' engagement in the HC project: what they touched upon was the implicit knowledge in practices and objects in school that are hard to grasp as they are hidden in their common everydayness. This implicit knowledge is part of everyday life in school and shapes the way we relate to each other and to the objects there. Their investigations ask whether the way we sit in a chair actually shapes (and restricts) the way we think and how we know these chairs. Through the investigative performances, the students not only study what a hidden curriculum and the implicit knowledge could mean

for them, but examine what a hidden curriculum does in the realm of the school, how it is connected to their bodies and their material environment, and most importantly how it is connected to processes of subordination and transformation.

I have tried to indicate so far, that it is not enough to pay attention to the discursivity of the body. It is also important to understand learning processes at school as being inscribed in the bodily practice of learning itself. What is meant by this is the "educational work" (Bourdieu 1977, 205) that people deploy on themselves in direct interaction with their material environment. Consequently, "the act of practising and learning physical postures corresponds to the formation of internal worldviews and vice versa" (Alkemeyer 2008, 53). Not to decide on either of these at the expense of any of the others (materiality, practice, discourse) has been the foremost task in this collaborative artistic research into hidden curriculum and makes it possible to have an account of the lived experience and material element of the body without abandoning social construction. At the basis of this is an understanding that ascribes a force to bodies that can influence the social life of the subject's body, entangled with the forces that a practice-related or discursive system evokes,[13] which makes it possible to problematize a too simple understanding of what constitutes a body in a learning situation. The Cartesian body-mind split inherent in schooling is critiqued in noting the disregard or devaluation of the physicality of education. Sport sociologist Thomas Alkemeyer has summarized an alternative to the body-mind split in noting: "When we learn, we learn as bodies" (2006, 121, my translation).

My experiences during the HC project and with the help of the students' insistence on performative, body-related investigations, has intensified my pursuit of this material, bodily path of learning, and engaging with unlearning. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze considers what is involved in learning to swim (1994, 165), which is similar to learning to ride a bike (see "Afterword: Unlearning as a Scaffolding for Living"). He observes that nobody would expect to be able to swim after reading a textbook or taking some classes outside a pool. Learning to swim requires the engagement of one's body with water. The approach of learning as a bodily activity is crucial. In the book chapter

13 With *bodies* I refer both to the bodies of the students, my own, or any participant in school, as well as any materials there such as furniture, objects, building, etc., and the bodies of knowledge.

"Bodies of Learning," education researcher Anna Cutler and philosopher Ian MacKenzie explore the bodily learning of swimming by distinguishing bodies and bringing forward a model of learning that differs from accumulative learning (2011, 53–73). Building upon Deleuze's elaboration, they detect not only the body of the swimmer who engages with the body of the water, but also the body of knowledge that could be considered embodied by the swim instructor. The interplay and hierarchical relationships among the bodies of learning give shape to processes of learning in a specific situation. Cutler and MacKenzie argue that in modernity the body of knowledge "as expressed through regulative method determines the relationship between the three bodies involved in learning." This means for the modern learning environment, "one learns the correct method in order to know what the instructor knows" (*ibid.*, 54). Such an understanding of learning establishes a hierarchy between the different bodies of knowledge and assigns a dominant place to the body of knowledge that is not only superior to the other bodies, but to the process of learning, presuming that learning is a process that culminates in a result called knowledge. Here, learning is reduced to a method for the acquisition of knowledge as opposed to viewing learning as a set of relations that emerge out of the entanglement of the different bodies involved in learning. As elaborated before, hooks notes that knowledge is not something to be possessed but to be engaged with. Accordingly, any kind of learning is not a passive reception of knowledge (from an expert). Translated into the school, the bodies of un/learning engage with each other and form a classroom experience that emerges through the relationship between the body of the learner (student), the bodies of environment (including tables, chairs, spatial, and temporal arrangement), and the body of knowledge (embodied in the teacher, curriculum). Consequently, the traditional bodies of knowledge (teacher, official curriculum) are challenged through the rearrangement of bodies of learning, which is an intervention that comes close to unlearning processes as discussed in this publication.

In *Collectively Rocking Chairs* (fig. 3) the students investigated the (re)use of objects in school and their attached power structures as a way to intervene in classroom routines like roundtable discussions. I was puzzled by the students' choice of this format. Why did they not choose the, for me more obvious, frontal-teaching method—one of the frequent examples of disciplinary schooling? The students' choice sparked many discussions

and prompted me to do further research in this direction, not least because the roundtable format is one of my preferred discussion arrangements in workshop settings. The roundtable is often thought of as democratic, or a "structural exercise by which is built up practical mastery of the fundamental schemes" (Bourdieu 1977, 91) of democratic behavior through the specific arrangement of bodies. Bourdieu sees a roundtable discussion as a socio-symbolic practice of equality, or, as a material, discursive, and practice formation at once. However, the circular-democratic arrangement of a roundtable can hardly hold its promise of equality.

I was part of a series of roundtable discussions connected to my work at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht. The first time I was invited I hardly knew anybody. Entering the room where everybody was already seated, I faced an encircled arrangement. Describing a similar situation in a primary school setting, Alkemeyer writes, "closely seated side by side, it was as if [the group] had collectively turned their back to the outside world" (2008, 56–57). Once I overcame this obstacle and found my place in the circle, I faced another challenge. The circular form makes all the participants visible to each other. There is no possibility of placing oneself in a back row, which would offer a certain protection if needed—especially for a newcomer. Considering the fact that the circular arrangement supports a greater range of visibility for all actors in the circle, it privileges those who know how to deal with this visibility or have the power to use the visibility toward their own ends. In a striking way it correlates with Foucault's criticism of the dominant paradigm of visibility in Western societies, elaborated before. Through Foucault we can better understand how the paradigm of visibility legitimizes oppressive modes of control in many areas of life and is subtly inscribed in a deeply democratic behavior in our bodies.

Two aspects are important in closing: firstly, a spatial-material arrangement is not independent of the sociopolitical context in which it is placed. The different bodies of un/learning emerge through these. A roundtable discussion is imbued with the norms and conventions that we as bodies bring to the table. At the same time the situation in which we participate, subtly pushes our bodies to accept a certain situation.[14] Both the spatial-material arrangement and sociopolitical context, shape the ways in which we relate to

14 See also "Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)" on pages 41–74 in this book.

each other. I suggest that participating in a roundtable is not only a bodily-structural exercise in democratic behavior, but also a bodily-structural exercise in the paradigm of visibility that we come to acccept in Western societies. Secondly, another socio-spatial order implies other forms of reproduction of inequality and it would be problematic to think of a democratic roundtable as neutral. A roundtable enacts a socio-symbolic order that brings with it new (informal and formal) inclusions and exclusions. This has far-reaching consequences for HC, for revealing a hidden curriculum does not necessarily help to overcome inequalities and dominant structures. Foucault and Haraway note that more knowledge does not necessarily help the subject out of subordination or domination. What it can do, is change and consequently produce different power relations (here, the rearrangement of bodies of learning), and at best minimize relations of domination. For the collaborative arts-based approach toward a hidden curriculum in secondary school education, and consequently for the project on unlearning, several aspects became important, summarized in what follows.

Practicing Unlearning in Three More Ways

Complicities in Establishing Hierarchies of Knowledge

A main challenge in HC was investigating what is regarded as (legitimate) knowledge in high school education. This examination necessarily needs to include studies on hidden curriculum in educational research. While these provide fruitful insights into theorizing a hidden curriculum in school in relation to social reproduction of inequalities, they are deficient when it comes to their own complicity in establishing hierarchies of knowledge. Existing studies on hidden curricula have been almost exclusively undertaken by academic researchers who decide what is important to address in school. The expertise is solely assigned to academic research. Ideas and visions of students (or teachers) have hardly played a role. In line with this, I position the arts-based research into hidden curricula along two trajectories: first, opening up the research to students to actively participate in the discussion of what is regarded as legitimate knowledge, what is neglected or not recognized as knowledge in school; second, having the settings aspire to the mutuality of a researcher-student-teacher-relationship. This is attempted through the

continuous exercising and studying of the group organization and reflecting on the ethical, class, and power configurations of its conditions. This is a tricky one, especially when writing (about) the collective research setting of HC, because it risks reinstituting a certain hierarchy of expertise that the project sets out to challenge.

When We Un/learn, We Un/learn as Bodies

The collaborative artistic research of the HC project has the capacity to approach what is taken for granted in school settings and educational research. The physicality of learning processes has surfaced prominently in many workshops over the years, whereas it has not appeared much in hidden curriculum studies so far. The attention to the entanglement of the material, practical, and discursive bodies of learning in school brings forth a model of learning that is different from an accumulative one. In it, learning is approached as a set of relations that emerge out of the entanglement of the bodies involved in learning processes. This opens up a perspective on unlearning as the rearrangement of different bodies of learning. Spivak's "training of the imagination" has been simmering throughout (see "Instead of Solving Paradoxes and Contradictions" on pages 95–121 in this book), and I tried to open it up toward bodily knowledge and the physicality of un/learning and imagination. This is intertwined with the discussion on cultural capital and *habitus* in this text, through which I articulate the potential of HC and desire for the study on unlearning—namely unlearning *habitus*.

To Be Hidden Does not Mean to Be Merely Revealed

Reflecting on the project's title has been important to make use of its somewhat misleading character. Setting up something as hidden suggests it will be about revealing the invisible. What is at risk of losing here is the examination of how (in)visibilities function in society, and how we might relate and utilize them for our own agendas. Bringing together thoughts on (in)visibilities produces discussions about the extent to which the visible world around us stays invisible for us.[15] Instead, I propose attending to the continuous presence and production of omissions. Again, it is too easy to concentrate on

15 See also Michel Foucault, writing that art "consists not in showing the invisible, but rather in showing the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible" (1997, 24).

revealing these omissions. The project looks more into how these omissions function in a society in which, for example, the dominant paradigm is one of visibility. This is a matter of incorporating in whatever we do, say, write, or read, that it will mean more than, and be different from, what we intend to communicate in words but also very practically, in actions and movements.

Letters: The classroom is burning, let's dream about a School of Improper Education

by KUNCI Study Forum & Collective

This text is an unedited reprint from KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, *Letters: the classroom is burning, let's dream about a School of Improper Education* (Brooklyn, NY: Ugly Duckling Press, 2020). © KUNCI Study Forum & Collective and Ugly Duckling Press.

Date: Jan 11, 2020, 11:10 PM
From: Sulastri[1] Nirvana Trimurti <sulnt@mail.com>
To: Murni[2] Dharmawinata <murninata@riseup.net>, Thothokkerot[3] <thothot@what.art>
Subject: A failed academia

Hey Murni and Thothokkerot,

Remember the postdoctoral fellowship I told you about the other day? I failed to get it. Again. I received a rejection letter from the university last week. I agree that what I need might be a little bit of luck. But I have my own theory about this:

I may have constructed a strong Curriculum Vitae with a relatively long list of written works and creative activities such as exhibitions and research residencies. But instead of regarding it as a valuable aspect of my intellectual profile, I was perceived as someone who has too many research interests. Someone who has too many research interests means he or she is not linear. Non-linearity means something that is not arranged in a straight line. Mine was definitely deemed too curvy, or too wild.

Exploration and creativity can be perceived as conditions that lack depth.

I am rejected because I haven't been nurtured by the university long enough. My coming of age as an intellectual has been molded not by the university *per se*, but rather by an independent system and self-taught attitude — study club, artists collectives, and nongkrong (hang out) with artists and activists.

I'm quite disappointed, it is as if I have to prove myself again and again in discomforting ways whenever I'm writing an application letter. There is an endless judgement of one's capacity. I'm struggling with the unspoken competitive culture in universities, and as usual it is only with you both I feel like I'm allowed to show my vulnerabilities.

How are you guys doing? It's still warm here. I need to brush up my swimming skills this year, like a proper prepper. Doomsday is near.

Cheers, Sulastri

Date: Jan 12, 2020, 1:15 PM
From: Murni Dharmawinata <murninata@riseup.net>
To: Sulastri Nirvana Trimurti <sulnt@mail.com>, Thothokkerot <thothot@what.art>
Subject: Re: A failed academia

Hi Sul, hi Thot!

Sulastri, my commiseration to hear about the rejection. I hope you've allowed yourself to eat a redemptive sweet dessert (the carrot cake on your Instagram looks delicious!).

How do you feel now, Sul? I'm sure you'll need time to process everything, but do you find you still have a prospect to work in the university? What I mean by prospect here is not just the chance of being accepted in a university. But how actually does the prospect of being a university lecturer help to form our critical and political subjectivization in the age of neoliberal capitalism? Hehehe. I beg your pardon for being an old grumpy SJW,[4] speaking as an art school drop out here!

I do believe teaching can be a form of activism, but how resourceful—or on the contrary, how limiting—is the university when it comes to practicing education as social transformation in our context? What's actually your plan, if you're ever accepted in the university? What kind of intervention can you think of? I want to know your thoughts on this. Maybe by dismantling your expectation of the university, we can think differently about your "failure" to get the job.

I remember our colleague Stefano Harney, who talks (and practices) educational intervention in the "underground of the university" (you remember this from his excellent dialogical book with Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*), aiming to disseminate knowledge produced within the classroom beyond its walls.[5]

And here we are, outside the walls—not waiting for the university to disseminate its knowledge to us, right? On your "theory" of being rejected, I agree we've never been totally nurtured by the university, and to add to that, aren't we kind of proud of it? Being a university lecturer is just a tool to reach a bigger transformative aim. If we ain't got the tool, then we have to look, or even build another tool. The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.[6] We could not even possess the master's tools!

Can we dream of building a new house with what we have? What kinds of pedagogical models, tools, and ecosystems have nurtured us to be critical, how do they sustain (or do they even sustain)? Let's think and dream about what we can do together outside the walls of the classroom. Maybe then, we can break those walls from the outside?

Cheers, Murni

Date: Jan 18, 2020, 9:00 AM
From: thothot@what.art
To: sulnt@mail.com, murninata@riseup.net
Subject: Re: A failed academia

dear s and m,

two important movements have emerged in universitas gadjah mada, yogyakarta, recently. one is gejayan memanggil,[7] considered by many as part of the biggest student protest after reformasi.[8] the other one is the #kitaagni[9] movement, which is a student protest and campaign as a reaction against the inaction of ugm in dealing with sexual harassment in the university.

the gejayan memanggil started as a discussion club consisting of students from different departments called "kultur"—it reminds me of the various study groups that emerged during the nkk-bkk policy.[10] you were part of one of the study groups during your time at ugm, no, sulastri? those kinds of groups that take place after class sessions because students were dissatisfied with the uninspiring lecturers.

the nkk-bkk policy was canceled so many years ago, after reformasi. but i found it interesting that students still find the need to organize a study group outside of the classroom.

higher education is being commercialized. students are now obliged to finish their study in 5 years maximum. is campus life successfully becoming "normalized" and depoliticized? (i'm distracted as i remember our friend from the

philosophy department anto labil who "finally" graduated after 17 years in the uni, haha — and now he's happily living his life becoming an eel farmer in wonosari).

the reality of post-reformasi leads the country to the continuous polarization of diverging political views, religious radicalisation, gender and sexuality-based oppression, and formal and informal censorship of the media. these have engendered a mixture of feelings, which should encourage us to reflect on our position.

what can a university lecturer do to perform educational intervention in the university? i would say they should stop teaching and start building a space and make time to learn and unlearn together.

can we create a new initiative which serves as a public learning platform? it seems appropriate to articulate what we feel in the development of a school. in defining our initiative as a school, how can we use it as an avenue through which we can practice unlearning, and more importantly to turn the unknown into a series of productive tools for understanding the contemporary social ecosystem and articulating the resourcefulness of interdependent subjectivities?

this reminds me of a book that we read together at the Rabbit Hole Theory reading club a few years ago. ranciere's book on joseph jacotot, *the ignorant schoolmaster*.[11] i'm currently re-reading it as i'm thinking about it in the context of art education. art education should be more imaginative! it's interesting when ranciere explored (in the last chapter) the fact that jacotot's experiment was being tried out as an educational policy on a bigger scale as a reformist agenda in louvain (in a military school!!) by the netherlands monarch. obviously, it didn't work out well.

ranciere writes: "jacotot was a master, not the head of the institution." (p.102). his "universal teaching" method is as simple as to announce: one can teach what one doesn't know and everyone is of equal intelligence. a poor and ignorant parent can thus begin educating their children. jacotot's method is the poor's method, and it cannot, and will not, work in a spoiled system of school,

party, government, or any kind of institution. but although it is the poor's method, it is not the method of the poor — everyone from any social rank can use it but ranciere emphasizes that they cannot institute it.

i'm sorry that you didn't get the job that you want, s. I agree with murni, the failure to get that not-so-good-job-anyway hints at a chance to do something else altogether. I'm on board if we're serious in making new ways of schooling!

and yeah, this might be the right time to believe in the tajikistani proverb, "you can only eat a chicken once; but that chicken lays hundreds of eggs."

perhaps it's a good sign to move forward and think about what teaching actually means, and whether there is still a form of radical school that we can practice together outside of the conventional process of institutionalization?

i'm attaching a screenshot of one of gejayan memanggil's protest posters. the wording is telling: empty the classroom, go to the streets, we'll meet at gejayan!

warmest,
+t+

Attachment

Screenshot4582_220919.PNG 58KB

Date: Jan 23, 2020, 11:27 AM
From: sulnt@mail.com
To: murninata@riseup.net, thothot@what.art
Subject: A Radical School?

Hey Murni, Thoto, thanks for replying with such criticality and care.

I know that I can always count on your friendship.

I'm changing the email subject to "A Radical School?"— with a question mark which perhaps cannot be simply answered and rather needs to be put into practice.

Actually, I often asked myself the same thing—what would I do if I worked in a university? To be completely honest, I never really see the university as an appropriate place to nurture the imagination of an intellectual. Maybe the current incarnation of universities does not foster the kind of critical practices that I seek to produce. Indonesian universities, which flourished in the 1950s and were idealised as an emancipative educational institution that would contribute to the process of nation building, followed the principle of "Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi," which refers to the three pillars of higher education institutions. These are (1) teaching, (2) research, and (3) community service.[12] I know this sounds like civil servants' jargon because we heard it all the time as students back then and we knew how huge the gap is between ideals and implementation.

However, a well interpreted tridharma principle, which is not only about producing knowledge but also engaging with community, is quite progressive because it stands against the academic ivory tower. But there is a bureaucratic nature of big scale institutions that is hard to overcome and I've heard many of my friends who work in the university feel exhausted with administrative work and thus have no real time to think. This situation is not only happening in Indonesia, I believe. I thought of entering the university as a form of intervention, to be in but also against the institution. But if that plan doesn't work out, I think there are other ways of intervention from outside the university indeed.

Thoto, I am looking for the Indonesian proverb which can be equated with that Tajikistani proverb. So far I haven't found one. Instead it has me going back to this one: guru kencing berdiri, murid kencing berlari. In English this is: the teacher pees standing up; the student pees while running. It's so funny—

why the reference to peeing? And it's about peeing while standing. It's so masculine. Anyway, the proverb has many interpretations, but for me it means that the teacher is a model for students and students will take whatever s/he has learnt and go beyond the teacher. With my privileges, I'm partly a product of the university (I have a PhD!). But being in the university, as well as outside of it (in study groups, collectives) has allowed me to think beyond what the university has taught me.

And Thot, as you brought up *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, it makes me think about Lekra's Turba method[13] (turun ke bawah, literally "going down," but also meaning "joining the proletariat"), where the figure of teacher/master should be sought out in the "wisdom of the masses"—those who are usually deemed the ignorant poor. This is also related to Murni's call to seek study practices that exist beyond the walls of the classroom, no?

I understand that the notion of "the ignorant" in Ranciere's and Lekra's stories are completely different in their kind and nature. Ranciere was actually pretty much challenging the hierarchical binary between the ignorant mass and the educated elite, and his works basically wanted to move away from that logic. Nevertheless, I still want to discuss with you this idea of bawah in Lekra's Turba. Perhaps we can think of bawah as a location of studying against the upper elite bureaucratized ivory tower.

JJ Kusni, in his recollection of the Turba method, wrote that in practice the artist/intellectual who's doing Turba should follow the Tiga Sama Rule (Three Sames), namely: Sama Kerja (Work the Same), Sama Makan (Eat the Same), Sama Tidur (Sleep the Same). Same or sama can also be understood as bersama (together). Kusni reflects that it is only through the Turba method and the Tiga Sama rules that we may obtain the true knowledge of the people.[14] There's still a patriotic aspect of Turba, as the movement to "go below" seemed to emphasize the location of the place through which the artists—assumed to inhabit the upper position—sought inspiration from the masses and worked for rakyat (the people). However, I find it's very emancipative to think of the mass as the source of knowledge, instead of people who have to be educated.

During Lekra's experiments with the Turba method in the 1950s, bawah mainly pointed to the peasants who live in villages. I'm interested in expanding the idea of bawah to unexpected places as our reality today is different from Lekra's time. Of course, the peasants are still at the heart of many progressive struggles, but can we also broaden and diversify the location of bawah today?

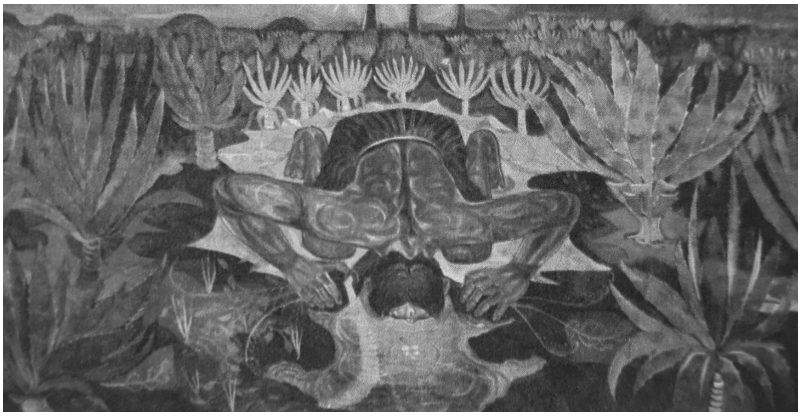
Are we, the precarious freelancers, artists, academics, activists, workers, who do not possess the means of production, actually also part of the below? Rather than going below, I would like to see where we will go if we start from below.

Lastly, before I forget, I went to Gary Foley's lecture last night. Gary Foley is an academic, writer, and Aboriginal activist. One of his prominent works was the Aboriginal Tent Embassy initiative in Canberra in 1972. There is something that he said which reminds me of your opinion about study groups, Thoto. In his lecture, Gary said that the early stage of his activism was shaped greatly through the organization of study groups with his fellow activists and students in the 1970s. Again I see the direct reltion between study groups and the organizations of protest on the streets. Doing study group might be seen as a quiet activity for some, but there is always something boiling in there...

Love,
Sulastri

P.S. Find attached an image of Amrus Natalsya's 1962 painting, titled *Melepas Dahaga* (Quenching Thirst) from Misbach Tamrin's book, *Amrus Natalsya dan Bumi Tarung* (Amrus Nataslya and Bumi Tarung), Bogor: Amnat Studio, 2008, p. 77. I like the subject's gesture of plunging into a mud hole. For me, the painting also invokes a metaphor for "going below."

Attachment



AN_Melepas Dahaga_1962_85x190cm_oil on canvas.JPG 194KB

Date: Jan 26, 2020, 5:53 AM
From: murninata@riseup.net
To: sulnt@mail.com, thothot@what.art
Subject: Re: A Radical School?

Sul, the last sentence in your email intrigued me. Amrus' painting is beautifully strong, indeed the visuality somehow prompts me to think about the translation of "bawah" in English. What is considered as the appropriate translation for bawah? Would "grassroots" be a better option, instead of "below?" You are so spot on in pointing out the meaning of below in its relation with the precariousness of freelancers in the art and cultural field. Through Amrus's painting I'd like to think we should not just plunge our head "below," but submerge our whole body in the water. I want to think out loud about what other meanings are attached to the notion of below. Below can be a learning space that is made possible by the social generosity of many people. The meaning of below in Turba seemed to emphasize the location of the place through which the artists sought inspiration from the masses. But can below also be the possibility to go to unexpected places? Location is no longer perceived as important, but the possibility of embarking on travel outside of the familiar zone is. To grasp the complex layered dimensions of below, we need to consider our feelings and how they engender the possibilities of encountering different realities, certain kinds of shocks.

This discussion about Turba also leads me to think about our Kuliah Kerja Nyata[15] experience. Turba and KKN share many aspects. Do you think Koesnadi Hardjasoemantri considered Turba when he conceptualised KKN back then? Recently I re-read old essays written by Hersri Setiawan[16] about Lekra. I found them very inspiring. In the essays, Hersri reflected on his Lekra period while making connections between Turba and the "inspeksi," or inspection, practiced by the officials of the New Order era. According to Hersri, the New Order regime undermined the meaning of Turba through their elite bureaucrat mentality bullshit. The essence of practicing Turba lies in the willingness to let the "bawah" exude all their alternative characters, to be absorbed by them, and in turn, to be part of the bawah. On the other hand, when these bureaucrats said that they were going to the village, what they actually did was ask the villagers to meet and greet them and pay respect to their visit in a grand manner. So, here again we find

radical practice meeting bureaucratization :-(. Oh, speaking of how the university can lead us to merely feeling discontent!

Thot, you told me that when you were joining the student press as a first year student in 1994, you were asked to write a review on Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire's books. This is an interesting story as there are many resonances in our current discussion about radical school with the pedagogical practices of Illich and Freire.

Talk more soon!

Love,
Murni

Date: Jan 27, 2020, 10:22 PM
From: thothot@what.art
To: murninata@riseup.net, sulnt@mail.com
Subject: Re: A Radical School?

hey m, s,

murni, funny how you asked about paulo freire and ivan illich in your previous email. it brings back some good, perhaps a bit romantic, memories of the reformasi movement. i was thinking that our discussion about the meaning of "below" in turba in relation with the desires to find and acknowledge different kinds of people will not only bring us to discuss the meaning of "people" but it also propels us to talk about what schooling really means. i read paulo freire in 1994, when i was a new student in gadjah mada university. of course i read the indonesian translation of the book. it was published as *pendidikan kaum tertindas* by lp3es, a research institution established in Jakarta in 1971.[17] i was required to write a review of the book as part of the assessment of the students who joined the student newspaper bulaksumur at the time. then we got excited about the possibility of radical pedagogy institutions and how ivan illich and paulo friere's thinking inspired us.

why paulo freire's book? i was too naive and thus i did not really think much about it back then. but i was quickly absorbed by freire's ideas about the banking concept in education practices and how he frames that as an oppression. recently i led a discussion group on the subject of contemporary art and alternative pedagogy. In the discussion, we came back to freire and i began to see the connection between freire's book and the student activists' realm before 1998. freire's book was part of the important reading material for student activists because it fit with the students' spirit to criticize the new order regime while attempting to break away from the stiff and suffocating campus. reading freire's book helps us to see how the authoritarian character of the state leaked into universities, and informed the expectations around knowledge production.

in the field of artistic production, we may remember moelyono or pak moel with his "seni penyadaran" which is heavily inspired by illich, freire, and boal. moelyono's concept of penyadaran adapts freire's conscientization.[18] it seems activists in the 1980s were influenced by these references. it's so fascinating how the fields of academia, art, and activism were so interconnected. it goes beyond the boundaries of disciplines, but shares the same spirit for social transformation. another point i want to make is that many of the things that we are discussing here are forms of studying that are perhaps unnoticed or deemed improper by the professional model of modern university education. you're right, sul — criticizing the university as an institution can be exhausting and melancholic. for now, it's better to think together: where else can we find other forms of "improper" studying? murni, you're also an artist, perhaps you can tell us about forms of studying in the arts that we can discuss?

+t+

Date: Jan 30, 2020, 11:05 PM
From: murninata@riseup.net
To: thothot@what.art, sulnt@mail.com
Subject: An Improper school?

Thoto! I really like the word "improper" that you brought up, so I changed our email subject to "An Improper School?" Still with a question mark following Sul's spirit of putting our discussion into practice.

I think we're going somewhere with our discussion about school here. I can sense it. Since you both brought up Freire et.al, I'm reminded of his famous quotation: "We make the road by walking." I think that's how our discussion is going so far.

The way you elaborate the term improper as not inferior to the "proper" modern school prompts me to think of improper as the alternative, (the other, the marginalized) that critically questions the standard of "properness" (Who made it? What for?) and incites again the possibility of transformative education.

Speaking of school as radical study practices, instead of a disciplinary institution/apparatus, I'm now thinking of nyantrik. In popular knowledge nyantrik (learning from the master) is considered to be practiced only in pesantren, the Islamic boarding school. Traditionally the santri[19] are practicing ngaji[20] and nyantrik under respected Kiai[21] throughout most of the day and they are obliged to perform certain ascetic practices. What's interesting is that in pesantren it is as if there is no line between life and studying. This history of education is often overlooked (or deemed improper!), as our imagination of schooling has been narrowed to "modern" colonial education defined by Dutch colonization.[22] Properness. Students wearing clean uniforms. Teachers standing in front of a blackboard and explaining encyclopedias. Punishment for bad behavior. Standard exams to pass a grade.

A certificate.

We may also trace the pesantren system as originating from Hindus' ashrama or Buddhists' vihara where students learn martial arts and meditation. These places of studying esoteric sciences get their local name in Javanese as pondokan or in the Minangkabau language (West Sumatra) as langgar or surau. There's no strict timeline for students to "graduate" from these places. I'm interested in how other forms of knowledge are being studied in these schooling systems that

exist alongside (not essentially opposed to) the modern Enlightenment epistemology, and the ways in which they were studied, which involved embodied practices where the mind and the body are not separated as in the Cartesian model.

A contemporary example of the pesantren schooling system is the Padepokan Seni Bagong Kussudiardja (PBSK). I read somewhere that Pak Bagong[23] actually took inspiration from pesantren in forming his performing arts school when he played a Kiai in Asrul Sani's film *Al Kautsar* (1976). He was impressed by the life of santri and their commitment to study in a pondok pesantren in Magelang where the film shooting took place, and later adapted some of the principles of pesantren and turned it into his own program of "cantrik-mentrik."[24] Here again we see the line between life and study blurred or removed as it is deemed to be unnecessary. The duration of studying does not follow a strict military-like school schedule, it happens all the time. The process of acquiring knowledge in cantrik-mentrik emphasizes the ability of students to become more sensible with their surroundings, to perform laku.[25]

Pak Bagong, for example, once asked his students to stare at waves on a beach for hours and hours without any explanation prior to the "assignment." After that, he asked the students to copy the wave's movement with their bodies. Being knowledgeable is a qualitative leap which cannot be measured with a numeric grading system. The spatial and temporal dimension of studying at padepokan certainly differs from the modern/colonial school system. The fact that Pak Bagong also danced along the line between the colonial binary of traditional and modern art is something worth exploring further.

In the arts, nyantrik is commonly understood as the relation between aspiring young artists and their artistic mentors, but I think we should broaden it and think more critically about this kind of relationship. What do you think, Sul, Thot?

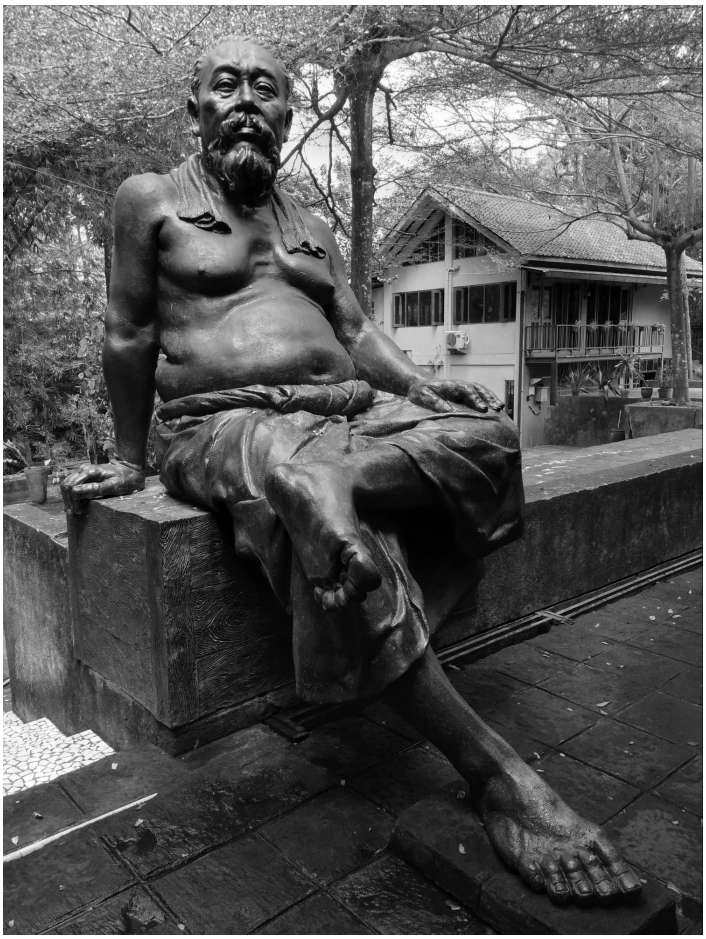
I'm wondering whether these types of schooling could provide tools to decolonize modern/colonial education? Of course the (male) hierarchy within these schooling systems is something that needs to be seriously addressed and problematized. I mean, eughhh, recently there was an awful sexual harassment case by the son of a respected Kiai in a pesantren in Jombang!!!

By the way, see the picture I attached here. It's Pak Bagong's sculpture at PBSK. Look at how "improper" his clothing style is — compared to the professional preppy look of a teacher/lecturer today. I like how laid back his gesture depicted in the sculpture is (although, I also heard from Pak Bagong's ex-student that he was a very temperamental teacher). We need more research questioning the

teacher figure, not only their artistic/ideological principles but also the affective (perhaps then also the ambivalent) nuance of their personality.

With love,
Murni

Attachment



Pak Bagong_PSBK.JPEG 49KB

Date: Feb 6, 2020, 2:30 AM
From: sulnt@mail.com,
To: murninata@riseup.net, thothot@what.art
Subject: Re: An Improper School?

Hi Murni and Thot,

Murni, I'm curious about when you said that we could attribute radical, or improper, as a prefix to the practice of the pesantren. To add to your explanation of pesantren, perhaps we could also consider it an exceptional form of "commune" that still survives at the moment, aside from indigenous peoples that live in the hinterland (the countryside), no? I don't want to do too much name-dropping here, but it looks like James Scott can be referred to, concerning this idea of commoning.[26]

But, what I want to talk about is the subject of hierarchy in pesantren. Especially the teacher and student relationship. Maybe we can regard pesantren as a platform for "lower class education" in the context of the Dutch colonial era, where the santri did not have the privilege of entering Dutch schools. This is also to consider that the pesantren educational model provides a material base (namely the boarding house) for poor people to live, eat, and study together. Of course the modernized version of pesantren is not always accessible for the poor. But, one question still lingers in my mind: whether we can consider this idea of "education in the name of the lower class" to be accurate when the hierarchy carried over from the feudal-style structure is entrenched in the education process? The question perhaps will lead us to the evaluation of not only the idea of hierarchy based on economic background but also the political dimension of knowledge transfer. The idea of knowledge ownership is structured around some subtle hierarchies. Within the context of a pesantren, the Kiai is regarded as a figure with divine power. And the only way of knowledge transfer has to be done through the Kiai.

Murni, I second what you said, that we should be able to broaden the discussion about nyantrik as more than just the relation between young aspiring artists and more established ones. In order to do that, I think we should shift the attention to nyantrik as learning from the master to nyantrik as an informal knowledge transfer. Laku is also an interesting form of studying practice that could perhaps

be deemed irrational or inefficient, seen from the highly professionalized and accelerated modern form of schooling. Your description of PSBK has captured beautifully the idea of learning as a condition to learn from the studying environment. What I am trying to get at here is that nyantrik should be perceived as the occasion where we are able to seek a different meaning of the teacher figure. The status of the teacher is created by the student. In this way, I begin to see a teacher not as a source of knowledge but more of a mediator, or a reflector, leading to another kind of knowledge.

With hugs and kisses,
Sulastri

Date: Feb 12, 2020, 9:52 PM
From: thothot@what.art
To: murninata@riseup.net, sulnt@mail.com
Subject: A Radical Improper School?

hi m, s,

sulastri's last email immediately triggered my mind to a random proverb that I found somewhere: "Be cautious of the three-breasted genie."[27] mainly because murni mentioned the educational process in pesantren and the sexual harassment case. sul, you are also totally right in pointing out the subtle hierarchy embedded in the charismatic figure and divine knowledge of kiai.

however, i think we share something in common here—we value the productive relation between studying and collectivity. schooling, or talking about school, leads us to discuss people. though we haven't articulated it yet we are sort of asserting our views that to study means to be with other people. studying is doing a deep hanging-out while continuously attuning to our social ecosystem. in light of that, we can reinvent and introduce school, or the idea of studying, as a tool to encourage solidarity. does that make sense?

speaking of colonial education, I cannot help but think about its counterpart, the sekolah liar (unlicensed school, or literal translation: wild school) that made the colonial government feel so threatened. sekolah liar emerged in the 1920s as a reaction against the discriminative colonial education policy that only allowed kids with a priyayi (elite Javanese) background to enter the school. one of the pioneers of sekolah liar is taman siswa (literal translation: garden of students), established in 1922 in yogyakarta by ki hadjar dewantara, now celebrated as the "indonesian father of education."

i perceive the taman siswa as an instance in which developing a school serves as a caring system for others. i think it's possible to link taman siswa's form of education with the pesantren system, as before establishing taman siswa, ki hadjar dewantara was active in a traditionalist kebatinan (meditation) group, the paguyuban selasa kliwon. I also noticed that taman siswa was also associated with the term perguruan (the term's meaning is rooted in a martial arts studying place) instead of sekolah (school, from Dutch language).

in taman siswa, students were given dormitories, or wisma, where they organized their communal life together. so it's quite similar to that of nyantrik and pesantren. i remember from reading some publications in the taman siswa education system[28] that studying hours are considered to be not only the time that students spend in the classroom studying various subjects—from language, earth sciences, economics, aesthetics, and history—they also involve activities outside of the classroom, including gardening, cleaning wisma (house), and joining political/civil organizations.

at taman siswa, the school ecosystem is organized in a familial, communal system, and so studying time at taman siswa is family life time that lasts 24 hours a day. there's an interesting aspect of conjugating "studying" and "living" together as a form of education. however, in line with what you said sul, about the problem of hierarchy in nyantrik, i find discomfort in the form of the paternalistic family organization, in which the father figure is seen as the leader and the teacher's task is to become a parent to nurture students. the manifestation of the father figure and kekeluargaan (familyness) was deployed by the New Order regime to control society in the name of "harmony and stability."[29]

what are the implications of this seemingly unequal relationship that exists in a patriarchal family? or to bring up ranciere here again: "how to strive for equal intelligence in communal living-studying?"

the name taman already evokes a different imagination of the established

school's physical construct. so it is important to organize this taman or garden for mutual and collective caring that welcomes diversity and questions inequality. i'm changing the subject of this email thread to "radical improper school" because i am thinking of a school that can generate radical imaginations of other ways of living. although the attempt can lead to failure or be deemed insufficient or improper, we/the school shall persist.

there was a poster that i saw in Motel Spatie, an art organization in Arnhem, Netherlands that is closely linked with squatting and autonomous groups. the same poster was also used to hang at lifepatch, a group that engages in community initiatives in science, art, and alternative technology in Yogyakarta. the words on the poster read, "this is a d.i.y. residence. we have no mother, no father, no family guardian, no nurse, and no one is paid to clean." i am attaching the image of the wall where the poster used to be seen. i like seeing the remnants of the double sided tape on the wall above the kitchen sink in lifepatch. it's like a reminder that cleaning the house is part of the mechanism for living and working together.

when there is no specific figure/person that possesses the sole responsibility to take care of everyone, caring becomes a collective and mutual task to share. self-organization becomes a site for social reproduction to reimagine itself continuously. can we organize a school that is built through mutual care?

sending you the utmost care and friendship, +t+

Attachment

Cleaning.JPG 75KB

Date: Feb 15, 2020, 5:42 PM
From: sulnt@mail.com
To: murninata@riseup.net, thothot@what.art
Subject: Re: A Radical Improper School?

Murni, Thoto, I just want to say that I've been enjoying our exchange so far.

Let's exercise our radical imagination now.

If we were a kind of plant, have you ever imagined what kind of plant would best define us? I quite like the idea that we are like grass, perhaps rumput teki, or nut grass. This grass is known, or misunderstood, as just an ordinary weed. On many occasions, it is considered too wild, difficult to control, thus unwanted among other cultivated plants. It finds a crack, an opportunity to thrive, even in the driest land. It is resilient, unbeatable. And it is useful too—for food, sleeping mats, folk medicine. Its usefulness is not a straightforward thing, but results from trial and error and experiments. A hope on the brink of despair. A curious light at the end of the tunnel.

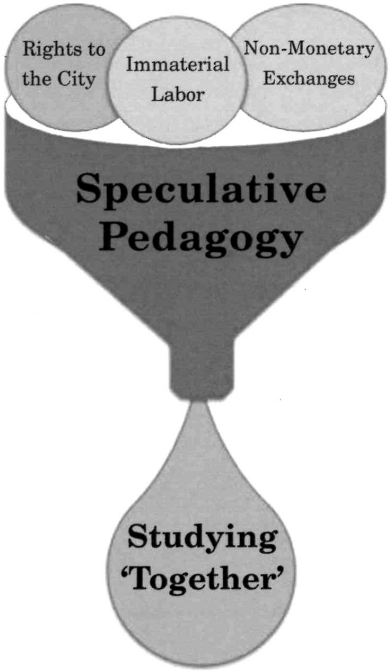
Suppose we are proposing our kind of school, do you think we propose slowness? Slowness that involves revolutionary patience. I wrote a short paragraph about slowness yesterday. Here it is:

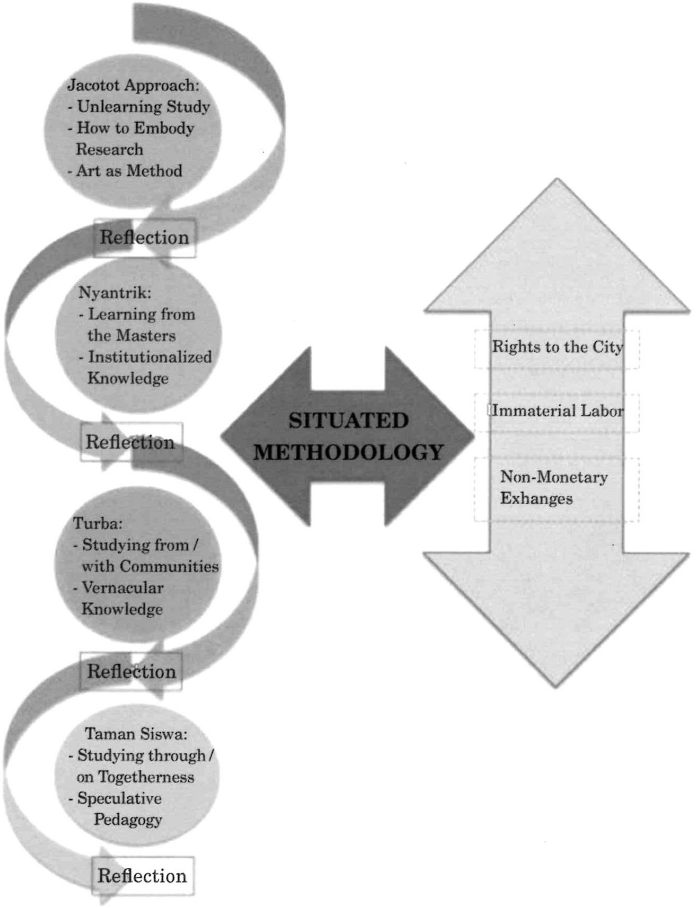
> *"Slowing down and seeping in strategies aimed at connecting different articulations of staying in, withdrawing, persevering, and surpassing chronic deterioration of marginalized forms of life in various geopolitical contexts. The strategies open up spaces for the still-hidden possibilities of the everyday to emerge from seemingly narrowing horizons for social projects. Simultaneously, this involves turning away from modes of (re-) presentation that, in trying to speak against the violent institutions of our times, are often inadvertently absorbed by the very things they seek to overcome. Through these approaches we propose ways of being with others and becoming together within and beyond spectacular consumption. We consider such approaches as durational frameworks that precipitate collective study: a time and space for collective listening, sense-making, and common solidarity in the wake of crisis as ordinary. What could the city—as a network of layered relationships and an assemblage of histories—offer and afford in studying solidarity?"*

The paragraph reads a bit heavy. I am trying to extract some points about studying, collectivism, and solidarity from our conversation. Somehow they feel sticky in my head. So perhaps I am just leaving the heaviness of the paragraph as is. Because I am still grappling with how we can connect studying, collectivism, solidarity, and other matters in between these things. How can we create a space where we invite others to study together? Such a space should also serve as a medium for all of us to unlearn everything that we thought we knew about studying. How can we create a condition in which studying together is also an avenue for developing more creative, engaging, and ethical approaches to society?

Love xxx
Sulastri

KUNCI SCHOOL OF INVISIBLE ECONOMIES





CODA

Sulastri, Murni, and Thothokkerot set up a Google Doc and together wrote an open call for the School of Improper Education, reflecting the urge to put their questions on studying together into practice. The text reads:

Open Call for the School of Improper Education[30]

We are building a new school. The school is an experiment on the sustainability of (both material and immaterial) economies of organization. We want to test the idea of school as a garden of ideas, a laboratory of affects, and a space where new ideas clash and coalesce. We are not yet sure about what can be learned in this school. But we are absolutely sure about not starting from the premises that specify what needs to be learned and not learned. We want to study together, while interrogating the meaning of togetherness.

Our bodies are entrenched with histories and memories shaped by formal educational institutions—school buildings, respectable teachers, uniforms, flag ceremonies, wooden desks, libraries, high fences, narrow hallways, too many things to memorize, exams, grades, ranks, report cards, and strict school regulations.

We start from the question: what does an improper education mean?

We want to problematize the hierarchical relations between teacher and student. We aim to unpack the homogenizing tendencies of pedagogical principles upon the body and mind. We would like to vitiate the emphasis of curricular desires around use value. Is it enough to describe one's own practice as an alternative education? How do we operate a study environment that doesn't turn knowledge into commodities?

We seek to recreate the notion of the classroom and invite those who have been improperly educated to engage in the space as well as disrupt it. At the School of Improper Education, the meaning of authority in knowledge reproduction will be scrutinized. We are looking for those who are eager to perform experiments on learning and teaching—of becoming a student and teacher at the same time, to oscillate in between different educational models. This invitation also goes to those who are keen to blur the boundaries between formal education and everyday realities.

At the School of Improper Education, you can stay within, and at once think outside of it. As a platform which strives for the principles of uncertainty and curiosity, the purpose of this school is to study the meanings of studying and the ways to study these meanings.

References

1 Sulastri Nirvana Trimurti often gets asked about the word 'Nirvana' in her name. Shouldn't it be 'Nirwana' instead, the Indonesian word for Nirvana? This is what people usually ask her. Meanwhile, Indonesian people think the name "Sulastri" sounds archaic. It seems at odds with the speed of the 21st century. Sulastri's parents are academics and hippies, which could explain her name. Sulastri derives from a protagonist in Suwarsih Djojopuspito's novel *Buiten het gareel* (1940). The novel is set in the late days of Dutch colonialism and narrates the story of Sulastri and her husband who preferred to teach in a "wild school" instead of colonial schools. The novel was initially written in Dutch after Suwarsih's manuscript in Sundanese was rejected by Balai Pustaka, a publishing institution under colonial patronage. In 1975, the novel was translated and published in Indonesian as *Manusia Bebas* (*The Free Man*). Trimurti derives from Soerastri Karma Trimurti, better known as S.K. Trimurti (1912–2008), a journalist, teacher, and labor rights activist. She was the first Minister of Labour although only for a short period (1947–1948) and a few years after that, when she was 41 years old, she decided to continue her study in the Economy Faculty of Universitas Indonesia.

2 Murni Dharmawinata embodies the overlooked history of artist I Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniasih (1966–2006) and art critic Oei Sian Yok (1926–2002).

The latter changed her name to Eugene Dharmawinata due to the New Order's discriminative racial policy against the Chinese Indonesian community. Murniasih was born into a poor peasant family in Tabanan, Bali, and moved to South Sulawesi as part of the government transmigration program.

At the age of 10 she moved to Jakarta and worked as a domestic helper before finally deciding to return to Bali and work as a jewelry silversmith. She started painting and exhibiting her works in the 1990s with her colleagues at Seniwati Gallery in Ubud. Murniasih's works bear witness to her subconscious and life experiences of being a woman in a patriarchal society through wild and absurd images that often provoke taboos on gender and sexuality. Oei Sian Yok was born into a rich family who owned a tobacco business in Magelang, Central Java, and studied

art history in the Netherlands. She was an art contributor for a weekly popular magazine in Jakarta from 1956–1961 and in this short span of her career she produced hundreds of articles. She stopped working as an art critic after the magazine was banned by Sukarno's government in 1961, and didn't continue to write after that. The reason why she ceased writing is still unclear to the public. There are similarities as well as radical differences between the two women not only in terms of their personalities, histories, and thoughts, but also in terms of privilege and social location. Murni Dharmawinata's name thus revolves around unstable and often contradictory identity performance.

3 Thothokkerot's name is excavated from tales surrounding an archaeological entity which exists through its plural and singular subjectivities. The historical sources of Thothokkerot are remembered almost like a voice transmitted by radio signal—heard, yet invisible. What's known of their history is an escape journey from their hometown called Gumurah or Gumuruh (meaning loud noise in Javanese) near Kediri, East Java. They were reportedly seen in various appearances, sometimes a woman, sometimes a man and/or both. One of the witnesses reported that they were a group of orphans who travelled to places such as harbors, farms, markets, villages, and cities where particular sounds live. They are guided and guarded by the wind. They left their hometown because the loud noises resembled the sounds of heavy machinery, muffler, railways, airplanes, and power plants that contaminated their land. They could no longer master their divine skill in mimicking and producing the sounds of the universe. They are disciples of sound improvisation, soundsmiths. They later doubted the divinity of the skills believed to be handed down by their elders. Now they look for pristine and pure sounds to create their soundcraft, searching in several places including a picket line, where they exchanged, mimicked, and crafted the sound of marches. The multiple histories and meanings of Thothokkerot attest to a long process of collective knowledge construction.

4 SJW stands for Social Justice Warrior. Literally, this term applies to activists who stand for social justice. Recently, this term has been used cynically and as a pejorative label applied to activists, feminists, and all peoples who stand for social and environmental justice.

5 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

6 Audre Lorde, The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House (London: Penguin Classics, 2018).

7 #Gejayan Memanggil (#Gejayan Calling): The future returns. Gejayan Street was once witness to a massive student movement in Yogyakarta among other protests in big cities in Indonesia that called for an end to Soeharto's New Order regime in May 1998. This was the area where the students in Yogyakarta protested and demanded political and economic reform (Reformasi) after the Asian monetary crisis. Indonesia was the country hit hardest by this crisis. One of the students from IST AKPRIND (AKPRIND Institute of Science and Technology), Moses Gatutkaca, had fallen victim to a peaceful protest which turned into a violent riot. In the aftermath of enduring protests in almost all big cities in Indonesia, the movement expressed students' demand for democracy and forced Soeharto to resign from his presidency. 21 years after reformasi, again, Gejayan Street witnessed student protests. Inspired by the memory of Moses, #GejayanMemanggil revived the Indonesian students' movement which was also spurred by a draft bill of the Indonesian Criminal Code (RKUHP), to be legitimized by the Indonesian house of representatives. As much of a millennials' movement as it may appear — unlike Reformasi 1998's wave — the movement nonetheless tackled diverse and nuanced issues by demanding the cancellation or review of aspects of the criminal code bill that touched citizen's private lives: from abortion to supranatural knowledge. The movement also demanded a revision of the Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (Commission of Corruption Eradication) bill, prosecution for governmental elites who are responsible for environmental destruction, the refusal of problematic bills on agrarian and labour affairs, urgency in passing bills on sexual violence, and prosecution for human rights violations. The protests were staged on September 22, 2019 and September 30, 2019. The media claimed that this was one of the biggest student movements after 1998. The protest also drew wider public support from various elements including high school students, women activists, artists and public intellectuals. The peaceful movement later sparked more student protests in other parts of Indonesia that ended with police violence and repression.

8 Reformasi 1998 is the political movement that resulted from the authoritarian style of President Soeharto's corrupt, nepotistic, and militaristic New Order regime that lasted 32 years. Following the monetary crisis in 1997, student protests, and riots, the year culminated in the Reformasi 1998 with the fall of Soeharto and reformation period.

9 #KitaAgni is a student protest and mass action held from 2018–2019 at UGM (Gadjah Mada University). #KitaAgni was also a hashtag to strengthen the will to show public support against sexual violence in the university environment. The hashtag functions to unite various small scale movements which spread all over Indonesia — through internet networking. This movement also protested against the inaction of UGM in dealing with a sexual harassment case. In 2019, this movement triggered other movements to encourage campuses of educational institutions to be more sensitive to the problem of sexual harassment. This movement was a warning that we are not in safe spaces even in higher educational institutions.

10 NKK-BKK is the abbreviation for a New Order policy called Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus — Badan Koordinasi Kampus (Normalization of Campus Policy — Campus Coordination Board). The policy was instituted in 1978 and aimed to force students to return to school. The students were silenced. The state made the university life sterile from political engagements. About this policy, Doreen Lee's study of the history of Indonesian student movement stated that the New Order government "dismantled the organizational structures of student politics, successfully instilled a long period of dormancy for the most critical segment of Indonesian society" (Activist Archives: Youth Culture and the Political Past in Indonesia, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019, 32). Lee also reminds us that it is important to think about the existence of the student movement in the 1980s, their sporadic small-scale activism as the mode which can be used to trace the similarities with student activism in the 1990s. Inspired by Edward Aspinall (see Opposing Soeharto: Compromise, Resistance, and Regime Change in Indonesia, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) who referred to the student activism in the 1980s as a "proto student movement," Lee further accords to the 1980s student movement "the status of handmaiden to the next more eventful chapter of pemuda history" (Lee, Activist Archives, op. cit., 32). In this light, we

want to think about the study group activities and their connection with the recent student movement organisation in Yogyakarta as an activism mode which might be learned and passed on from the 1990s. We imagine study group as the kind of quiet activity which serves as the catalyst for organising the people on the streets.

11 Jacques Rancière, The Ignorant Schoolmaster, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

12 The state requires that the universities need to observe the Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi principle. Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi, or Three Pillars of Higher Education, encapsulates the three principles of vision that universities in Indonesia need to undertake to carry out their educational activities. The three principles read as follows: education and teaching, research and innovation, and community service.

13 The Institute of People's Culture (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, abbreviated as Lekra) was a leftist institute established in 1950. Their urgency to produce seni kerakyatan, or art for the people, set the aesthetic and political standard for evaluating art in the 1950s and 1960s. The close relation between Lekra and the Indonesian Communist Party has been a source of discussion for other scholars (see also *Antariksa, Tuan Tanah Kawin Muda: Hubungan Seni Rupa-Lekra 1950–1965* [*A landlord married young: The relation between visual art and Lekra 1950–1965*], Yogyakarta: Yayasan Seni Cemeti, 2005; Michael Bodden, "Dynamics and Tensions of Lekra's Modern National Theatre," in *Heirs to The World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965* (ed. Jennifer Lindsay and Maya T. Liem), Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012, 453–484; Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri, "Lekra and Ensembles: Tracing the Indonesian Musical Stage," in *op. cit.*, 421–451). Lekra was an example of an art association that was able to formulate a method for articulating artworks that not only had high artistic value but were also emblematic of Indonesian identity and the people's culture. Keith Foulcher cites the artistic and ideological principles of Lekra as follows: "Adhering to the principle of politics as the guardian, we conduct the combination of five propositions — egalitarian and eminent, high quality ideology and high artistic value, combining the good practices of traditions with revolutionary contemporary values, combining the creativity of the individuals and the wisdom of the masses, and combining socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism through

the turun ke bawah method." See Keith Foulcher, *Soci*al Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian 'Institute of People's Culture' 1950–1965, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies (Clayton: Monash University, 1986).

14 J.J. Kusni, Di tengah pergolakan: Turba Lekra di Klaten [In the Midst of Turbulence: Lekra's Turba in Klaten] (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2005).

15 Kuliah Kerja Nyata (KKN) roughly translates as "practical university studies." KKN is a student community service organization, and an established mechanism designed to deliver concrete contributions to the people. The implementation of KKN is part of students' obligation during their final year in the university. In the KKN scheme, the participation of students in the "real world" is part of a top-down requirement to complete their degree (Paul K. Gellert, "Optimism and Education: The New Ideology of Development in Indonesia," Journal of Contemporary Asia 45, no. 3 (2014): 371–93). In KKN, students are obliged to live in a designated village, or desa, to design and do various kinds of kerja nyata, or "practical work" for the people of the village. Yogyakarta-based Gadjah Mada University was one of the firs universities in Indonesia to implement the kind of voluntary work that would later become KKN (Koesnadi Hardjasoemantri, Peranan Proyek PTM dalam Pengembangan Pendidikan: Sebuah Kasus Peran Serta Mahasiswa Indonesia [The Role of PTM Project in Education Development: A Case Study of Indonesian Student Contributions], Balai Pustaka, 1983). Within the Gadjah Mada University context, the embryo of KKN can be traced back to the history of Pengerahan Tenaga Mahasiswa (Student Workforce Deployment), abbreviated as PTM, in 1951. In the PTM scheme, Gadjah Mada University sent out their students to conduct Pengerahan Tenaga Mahasiswa in schools outside Java.

16 Hersri Setiawan (b. 1936) is a writer, historian, and activist who became a political prisoner at Buru Island, following the Soeharto-led bloody massacre of communist sympathizers in 1965–1967. Hersri played a central role in Lekra (see endnote 14) and was the representative of the Indonesian delegation at the secretariat of the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau in Sri Lanka. Hersri has written more than 10 books about the silenced, tragic histories of 1965. His latest book is Memoar Pulau Buru (Buru Island Memoir), Jakarta, Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia (KPG), 2004, which

narrates his personal accounts as a political detainee on Buru Island for nine years.

17 Paulo Freire, Pendidikan Kaum Tertindas, trans. LP3S team (Jakarta: LP3S, 1994).

18 Moelyono, Pak Moel Guru Nggambar [Mr. Moel The Drawing Teacher] (Yogyakarta: INSIST Press, 2005). It's interesting that Moelyono identified himself at that time as "guru nggambar" (drawing teacher) instead of seniman (artist).

19 Santri is a pupil in a pesantren.

20 Ngaji is a religious education, and one type of study that can be found in pesantren. Ngaji, as a verb, can mean reciting the quran but it is also connected to the term kajian (reading closely/studying the meaning of something).

21 Kiai is a religious leader, or a religious teacher in a pesantren.

22 An exception is Ben Anderson's seminal work which examines the close connection between pesantren and the nationalist revolution. See Benedict Anderson, Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance 1944–1946 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

23 Pak Bagong refers to Bagong Kussudiardja. Bagong was an esteemed Indonesian visual artist and choreographer. On returning from his dance training with Martha Graham in the United States, Bagong founded Padepokan Seni Bagong Kussudiardja in 1958. A padepokan usually refers to a space where a group of people learn to practice a certain kind of art under the auspices of a mentor.

24 Cantrik-mentrik refers to the pupils in a padepokan. Cantrik denotes a male pupil, whereas mentrik denotes a female one.

25 Laku is a Javanese word, referring to an act of asceticism, combined with a soul searching process.

26 Pesantren have become a specific niche for traditional knowledge sharing in the modern era. To compare the existence of a pesantren with the methods of knowledge sharing practiced by the people in the hinterland, see James C. Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

27 This proverb is a form of confabulation. There is no actual proverb like this. The function of such a confabulation is to question about what counts as proper knowledge. The proverb suggests hidden questions regarding authorship and the validity of "legitimate" knowledge.

28 Examples of magazines published by Taman Siswa include Keluarga (November-December 1936; January-February 1937), and Pusara (1935), passim.

29 See a wonderful anthropological study on the relationship between family and school as a form of control in Saya Sasaki Siraishi, Young Heroes: Family and School in New Order Indonesia (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publication, 1997).

30 *Letters: The classroom is burning, let's dream about a School of Improper Education* explores the possibilities of studying and co-learning for investigating, imagining and practicing old and new territories of social transformation processes. We develop the ground to state that collective study is a modality to traverse and connect institutional, disciplinary and geographical boundaries. In this essay, we use the ideas of KUNCI's School of Improper Education as the central locus of discussion.

The text unfolds through two mutually constructive narrative devices. The first part is a fictionalised account of email correspondence between three best friends, Sulastri Nirvana Trimurti, Murni Dharmawinata, and Thothokkerot. The conversation begins with Sulastri's email to Murni and Thothokkerot, lamenting her failure to get a postdoc position at the university. Through their exchanges we narrate the discourse behind the development of the School of Improper Education, which intertwines stories of personal struggle; limitation; questions around what can be done in the time of crisis; and the usefulness of art, intellectual practices, and activism.

The second part is located in the endnotes section of the essay. It serves to contextualise the first part in contemporary Indonesian discourse and can be read as historical backdrop, shared cross references, and collective bibliography. In writing the second part, we seek to reflect on the social issues in our surrounding further, against our personal experiences. As an experiment in collective writing, we see a reflection of our collective-selves in Sulastri, Murni, and Thothokkerot. Or rather, Sulastri, Murni, and Thothokkerot, are the mediums through which we reinvent ourselves time and again.

It seems appropriate to structure the conversation between Sulastri, Murni, and Thothokkerot in the form of email exchanges. In organising Kunci activities, as the members are living in different cities (Yogyakarta,

Melbourne and Orange in Australia and Berlin, Germany), we rely on various forms of communication mediated by various mobile phone and computer applications — Line, Facebook Messenger, Gtalk, WhatsApp, Skype, and Google Docs. The epistolary form conjures up the spirit behind an action. Such spirit is often hidden. Communication in the form of letters and emails is assumed to be confidential We pay attention to the confidential character of the letters and how they contain all the reasoning, doubts, fear, and vulnerability, as well as a sense of confidence, dignity, and determination. They represent all the salient and seemingly unimportant matters which lead to something. Like a diary, their power emanates only upon being revealed by someone. Some references, in the form of letters, but also non-fiction works, provided inspiration for this writing — Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang by Kartini, trans. Agnes Louise Symmers as Letters of a Javanese Princess (Whitefish Kessinger Publishing, 2010) and The Mute's Soliloquy by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, trans. Willem Samuels (New York: Hachette Books, 1999).

The School of Improper Education has been around since 2016 and operates by exploring the historical remnants of various studying practices in order to carve out what can be constituted as "an alternative." As the starting point of this endeavour, we experiment with four pedagogical concept-practices: 1) the Jacotot method (re-conceptualized by Jacques Ranciere's The Ignorant Schoolmaster), which we set up to demand for the recognition of universal intellectual equality and to propose possibilities to create a learning environment from a situation where the students and the teacher do not know anything about a certain subject; 2) Turba method, an acronym of turun ke bawah (literal translation: going below), an artistic-research-activism method formulated by LEKRA in the 1950s-1960s. Turba encourages artists and intellectuals to seek knowledge by generating dialectical progressions with the wisdom of the masses; 3) nyantrik, an ascetic studying practice which has evolved from pesantren and is now often found in "traditional" performing arts communities. Nyantrik undoes the boundaries between life and study, and the process of acquiring knowledge in nyantrik emphasizes the ability of students to become more sensible with their surroundings; and 4) Taman Siswa (literal translation: Garden of Students) taken from Soewardi Soeryaningrat's teaching

principle formulated in 1922 as an attempt to counter the infantilizing moorings of Dutch education in the colony. There are 43 people currently listed to be the participants of our school. In organising the school, we are expanding the scope of our intellectual camaraderie and friendship.

Tired in Archives

The library was quiet as usual—barely audible the sound of ventilation, whispers, and breathing. You search your place, meandering through the corridors, picking up material at the reception desk. You walk to the shelves where you find some more, old magazines, pamphlets, sketches that you are about to study.

You flip through the material, reading, searching. Flipping becomes paging, becomes one page at a time, becomes a paragraph. Your finger starts to hold the line to assist reading, until the images and letters start to dance in front of your eyes.

You slowly surrender to the fatigue. Your head gets heavy, arms press against the table, you wish to lay down, but the sofas are already taken by other visitors—sleepers, drowsers, nappers, readers. You make yourself as comfortable as possible to receive. To receive the spirits, timelines, and unchronological moments of histories. Some weigh heavy burdening your sleep with the duress of time, others are fleeting, a whiff or a faint smell that caresses your skin.

You were always puzzled by what libraries and archives do to you. Such peculiar places. Full of energy you planned your visits, entered the library, only to feel a tremendous tiredness creeping into your limbs. You couldn't bear it, fight it—avoid it, curse it. Again and again, and for years, you tried. Something pulled you in, something knocked you out. You've acknowledged your fate.

Then, a friend invited you.

"Would you like to come along for a study meeting? We meet at the city archive."

"I am sorry, I can't. And besides I won't be much of a help," you excused yourself.

The friend did not let up, you finally joined.

To your surprise, the archive is full of people dozing, slumbering, drowsing. "Why are they not sleeping at home?" you ask.

She counters, "it depends on what you understand as sleeping."

You still remember how you nervously listen to the asynchronous rhythm of breathing, sometimes interspersed with bits of snoring, whispers, nervous mumbles.

"Is this a dormitory?" you scoff baffled.

"No, a study place."

You follow her through the corridor along the shelves and tables occupied by guests.

"Do you wanna try?" she turns around to you.

You frown.

"It won't be an easy encounter, if a connection happens at all."

You are glad she asks.

The unacknowledged spirits choose their medium for circulation. Bodies, your body might become a small node within the streams of histories. A node for the movements, twists, and turns in the infrastructures of times.

You are confused, already for a long time. You are struggling with the aftermath of separating yourself from what you study. You study, observe, select, dissect.

"Where is my place?" you hesitate again.

She does not hear you, attending to one of the drowsers.

"They haunt us, study us," she turns to you again. "We were long enough hunting. We need to learn to acknowledge."

The technologies to uphold this separation produce particular ghostings. The scars of separation are deeply felt, and the ghosts of suppressed histories of apartheid are everywhere, and in particular ways in archives and libraries.

For a long time, you have believed in concentrating on what is literally in front of your eyes, not what is around or behind you, or what was going through you.

"Finding ways to live with these energies, the spirits, and ghosts of times and histories, let alone conversing with them, is hard work." She warns, "choose your material wisely, but be aware that they are also choosing you."

Since then, you have dedicated your time to dwelling in archives. You are now what is called a drowser apprentice of some sorts. Together with others you learn to cope, bear, and juggle ways of studying, dwelling, inhabiting archives. The other day you shared with a sleepy newcomer what you do. "We learn to read our scars of separation. They give us hints, show some paths."

Other times, you have not agreed with, nor understood what you are taught, shown, and what you sense. With your colleagues, you share

the ups and downs of receiving, being haunted, while hunting is what is passed down to you through generations, what you learned to desire. You guide the energies through your bodies, conjuring some spirits, letting down others, and being let down.

Within a plethora of times, you are slowly becoming a time traveler without traveling times in the common sense. You are traversed by times. Sometimes, you get frightened again. That you would summon spirits, ghosts, and timelines that overwhelm you. You take courage in the words of a friend. "The spirits and hauntings have long awaited you. And there will come a time when you need to be ready to let go."

Re- and Un-Defining Tools: Exploring Intersectional Approaches to Digital Search Tools in Library Catalogues

This conversation was commissioned by KUNCI Study Forum & Collective for *MARCH—A Journal of Art and Strategy*, "Tools for Radical Study: A Collection of Manuals" (March 2024). An earlier version is published in Hackers & Designers, *First...Then, Repeat. Workshop scripts in practice*, edited by Anja Groten (Amsterdam: Hackers & Designers, 2022, 50–60. The text here is a lightly edited version written by the Feminist Search Tools working group (FST). Their members have changed throughout the project. Read-in (Sven Engels, Annette Krauss, and Laura Pardo) and Hackers & Designers (Anja Groten) initiated the early version, with Aggeliki Diakrousi, Ola Hassanain, and Alice Strete later joining, after the start of a further iteration of the tool, the so-called "visualization tool" during the Digital Methods Summer School in 2019, www.wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/SummerSchool2019. FST members are part of Read-in, a self-organized collective that experiments with the political, material, and physical implications of collective reading and the situatedness of reading, read-in.info (Annette, Laura, and Sven, with Ying Que), and Hackers & Designers, a nonprofit workshop at the intersection of technology, design, and art that through hands-on learning, stimulates collaboration across disciplines and expertise, hackersanddesigners.nl (Anja, André Fincato, Heerko van der Kooij, and formerly James Bryan Graves), Ola, Aggeliki, and Alice. feministsearchtools.nl

by Feminist Search Tools working group: Aggeliki Diakrousi, Hackers & Designers (Anja Groten), Ola Hassanain, Read-in (Sven Engels, Annette Krauss, and Laura Pardo), and Alice Strete

The Feminist Search Tools (FST) working group is an ongoing artistic research project (2017–present) that studies the power structures that library and archival search engines reproduce. In so doing we offer an intersectional lens through which to look at (computational) searches, and thereby inquire into how to render marginalized voices within them more easily accessible and searchable. Starting in 2017 at Utrecht University Library, in 2020 FST shifted to the IHLIA LGBTI Heritage Collection, an independent organization within the Amsterdam Public Library (OBA) that collects information about LGBTIQ+ communities.[1]

The following conversation is the second of its kind. As members of the FST working group we reflect on our motivations and working together,[2] the situatedness and processual character of the project, and (mis)understandings around the term "tools." We specifically refer to a digital search interface in different iterations that allows for textual search queries within digital catalogues and archives. As the tools we used never really solidified in a way that could easily be applied to contexts other than those for which they were developed,[3] we attend here to the tool-making or -imagining process to complicate and expand our understanding of them (digital and otherwise) and their implications for specific contexts.

Tools as "Modes of Address" and "Digital Study Objects"

Anja Groten

Considering that we had very different encounters and experiences with the tools created within the FST working group, I propose we start our conversation with an open question: what were everyone's initial expectations for working on a digital tool, and how have these expectations been met or perhaps changed over time?

Annette Krauss

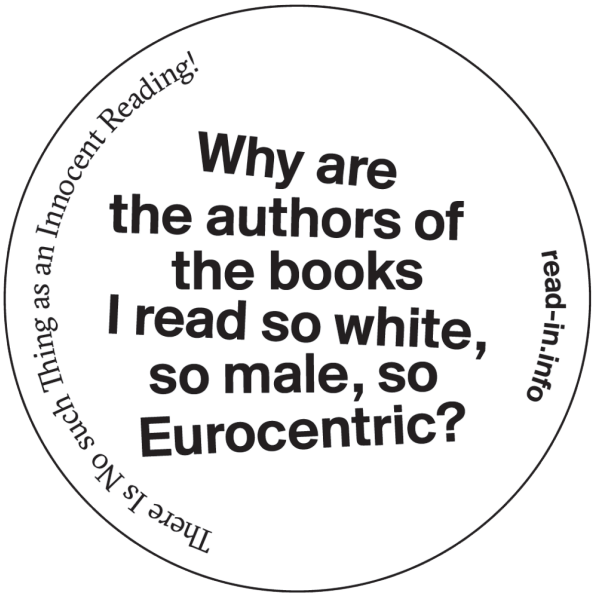
I still remember how some of us in Read-in got interested in the term "tool" and more specifically, "digital tool" through the question of scale. During our previous project,

1 See ihlia.nl.

2 For more information on modes of working together, see also the first conversation "Doing and Undoing Relationships," Feminist Search Tools, March 3, 2020, www.feministsearchtools.nl.

3 For more details, see "Teaching the Radical Catalogue: Session 4," recorded conversation, www.syllabus.radicalcatalogue.net/session4.html, and a text whose title quotes from a core question developed by Read-in: Lucie Kolb and Eva Weinmayr, "Why are the authors of the books I read so white, so male, so Eurocentric?," *Fabrikzeitung*, December 17, 2021, www.fabrikzeitung.ch/why-are-the-authors-of-the-books-i-read-so-white-so-male-so-eurocentric-a-conversation-with-feminist-search-tools-group/#.

Fig. 1 Silver Sticker, "Why are the authors of the books I read so white, so male, so Eurocentric?" on bookshelf, IHLIA LGBTI Heritage Collection, Amsterdam, 2020



Bookshelf Research (2012–present),[4] we physically spent quite some time in small, (grassroots) libraries studying the categorizations of publications. For me, Bookshelf Research was therefore actually already a tool. By passing every single print-based item in the library through our hands, we became acquainted with the library and tried to figure out its different categories — publishers, languages, genders, materiality — resulting in a statistical breakdown of inclusions and omissions. For instance, we looked at the Grand Domestic Revolution Library of Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, which holds around three hundred books.[5] The digital dimension of the tool became more explicit when we shifted our attention to Utrecht University Library, which holds three million books, and a physical counting exercise was no longer possible in the same way. What remained was the desire to challenge the coloniality of modern knowledge production by asking: *Why are the authors of the books I read so white, so male, so Eurocentric?*[6]

Anja

You referred to Bookshelf Research as a tool. What do you mean by that? Do you regard "tool" as a synonym for "method"?

Annette

I rather see "tool" here as a *mode of address*, a set of search mechanisms, or principles. I think it has to do with my disbelief in the possibility of transferring methods from one context to another without doing harm. A mode of address proposes something that a method has difficulties attending to — namely, situatedness and context-specificity.[7]

Sven Engels

I think at some point I started equating tools with "digital tools." This created a disconnect for me because I felt I wasn't that easily able to access what those tools do. At the same time, the notion of the tool as a "digital object" — an interface — also came with the expectation of its usability. This also brings up the question of "use for what" and "for whom," whether a tool

4 Bookshelf Research proposes counting exercises for specific private or public libraries and bookshelves according to categories such as gender, nationality, and materiality, resulting in reflections and conversations about statistical breakdowns and their inclusions and omissions. See read-in.info/bookshelf-research.

5 Casco is an experimental organization based in Utrecht that focuses on two key practices, art and the commons, as both tools and visions for better ways of living together. See casco.art.

6 For more on Read-in, see www.read-in.info/why-are-the-authors-of-the-books-i-read-so-white-so-male-so-eurocentric.

7 See Dagmar Bosma and Tomi Hilsee on mode versus method in "Gathering amidst the ruins: on the potential of assembly within the context of art institutions," symposium, Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, Utrecht, October 27, 2021, www.casco.art/activity/gathering-amidst-the-ruins-on-the-potential-of-assembly-within-the-context-of-art-institutions.

should also produce some form of result. Thinking about the tool as a digital *study* object creates room to explore these and other questions and what the tool actually does.

Anja
The idea of a tool as an enhancement, something that's supposed to make our processes easier — processes that would happen anyway — that might have also caused some confusion around the project, don't you think? Interesting and important confusions and, again, also expectations.

Laura Pardo
When we started talking about *tools* rather than *the tool*, my perception and expectations changed. From the beginning stages of the FST project, during our first conversation with Atria,[8] we had questions like: is the tool going to work? There has indeed been a certain expectation of the tool to produce a result or a solution to a problem. The fact that we would make a digital tool made me especially scared and cautious. In my understanding of digital tools, they tend to be binary: it's either this or the other. Everything in between gets lost. Realizing there is not just one tool, but a kind of ongoing toolmaking process that includes different modes and materializations through which we can ask questions about tools, was a very important part of the process.

Sven
When you talk about the things that get lost, do you refer to the decisions made that factor into a tool, or are you referring to the conversations that are part of the toolmaking process that might no longer be visible?

Laura
It's both. We always say that moments like this — our conversations — are so valuable and important. When you have a product, a finished search interface, for example, those conversational elements can get lost. I think it is great that we bring the conversations, pieces of audio, or images together on our project website. But when making some kind of tool, you also need to come up with solutions to problems, right?

Aggeliki Diakrousi
From listening to your thoughts, I want to return to how scale played a role for you in the beginning. When the database becomes so big that somehow you can't relate to it anymore as a human, it exceeds your understanding and therefore challenges matters of trust. I also like the idea

8 Atria, Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (Atria, Institute on gender equality and women's history) collects, manages, and shares the heritage of women and women's movements and promotes equal treatment of all genders. See atria.nl.

of the conversational tool because it means the tool can be scaled down and become part of the conversation and it doesn't have to give a solution to a problem. In conversation with the tool, we can address issues that we otherwise don't know how to solve. If we don't know how to solve things, how would a tool solve them? The tool is our medium in a way. I am interested in finding more of these bridges to make the tool a conversational tool.

Annette

I have grappled with the role of scaling throughout, being attracted and appalled by it. This is what I tried to point at with modes of address. The work of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing could be interesting here, when she refers to scaling as a rigid abstraction process (2015). She criticizes science and modern knowledge production for their obsession with scalability. She describes scalability as the desire to change scales – expanding a particular area of research or production without paying attention to the changing contexts. This has provoked many forms of colonial violence because scalability avoids contextualization and situatedness in order to function smoothly, and therefore it ties in with an extractivist logic. I believe by means of conversations we attempt to bring back context and situatedness. Conversations ground us.

Laura

Isn't our struggle with addressing the question of gender (and also race, class, sexuality, disability) in our first prototype, a digital interface that engages with the records of Utrecht University Library, an example in this direction?[9] We are working with a big database and have to find solutions to address certain questions. And by choosing a specific solution, many other modes are not chosen, and we know these choices also lead to misrepresentation.

Alice Strete

I remember we were looking for the gender of the authors at the beginning of the project, approaching it by looking at the dataset of Wikidata.[10] I think at that point I expected that the information would be

9 The first prototype experiments with a search field into which the user can type a search term. The search takes place within a selection of the records of works published between 2006 and 2016. The choice is made by the FST working group and is based on a number of MARC 21 fields. MARC 21 (an abbreviation for machine-readable cataloguing) is an international standard administered by the US Library of Congress; it is a set of digital formats used to describe items that are catalogued in the context of a library, such as Utrecht University Library.

10 Utrecht University Library could not provide access to information regarding the gender of an author. We therefore decided to link our dataset to Wikidata, which provides information about an author's gender. The first version of the FST compared both datasets based on name and attributed the gender according to Wikidata.

available for us and we just needed to find it and figure out how to use it. But then I realized I had to adapt my expectations about how to extract insights from the database, which was not obvious to me from the beginning.

Sven

The biggest clash in that regard for me was when we tried out Gender-API.[11] It attributes gender based on how often it is associated with a name online. Not only does this lead to faulty results, but it also disregards self-identification, which is so central to gender identification. This definitely forced us to rethink how gender could be identified in different ways and with different tools that also take self-identification into consideration.

Ola Hassanain

When I joined the project, I asked questions that derived from a concern about the classifications we would be using and how the tool would filter certain searches. My concern was that the tool would take us from one way of classifying to another. When you look for "knowledge," at least from my perspective, you have to exercise a level of caution. These general classifications are out there and while you do not adhere to them or abide by them, they are there. I had a brief conversation with Annette about the tool having to change over time. To make a point, I used the example of the Neufert (2019) architectural catalogue, which has become a guideline for international standardization of the estimation of distances around architectural things.[12] If you want to design a table, you have all these ranges to estimate with: distances, heights, etc. So basically, whatever comes out of architectural design goes through, or operates within, a fixed framework. Anyway, my question was whether the tool-building has its own space, or whether it builds upon the categories and classifications that the libraries are using. The interesting thing about the Neufert catalogue is that it gets updated every year

10 Utrecht University Library could not provide access to information regarding the gender of an author. We therefore decided to link our dataset to Wikidata, which provides information about an author's gender. The first version of the FST compared both datasets based on name and attributed the gender according to Wikidata.

11 If the comparison to Wikidata did not yield a result, the algorithm would identify the gender of an author based on the so-called Gender-API, a commercial application that assigns the binary gender categories (female/male) based on names. Gender-API is usually implemented in commercial websites in order to optimize customer experiences (female-identified people see search results that are relevant for their gender category as defined by the company). The Gender-API brought about many issues, one of which is that it excludes nonbinary gender categories. Another issue is that Gender-API is a closed-source technology. Gender-API is a black box technology made for marketing purposes. Thus, we were incapable of reconstructing exactly how the program determines and applies gender categories.

12 See also www.i.pinimg.com/originals/e5/e9/87/e5e98756 0e528dab906a52893cedead0.jpg.

or every other year. It's pushed back into the design world as a new edition every time, as something that is regenerating. So how does a search tool respond to something that is constantly changing?

Annette
I understood the Neufert catalogue more as a standardization tool and normative rules comparable to the library classifications developed by the Library of Congress in the US. However, you actually stress its flexibility.

Ola
The tool has to cater to that constant change. My question was about whether we can have more diverse or inclusive ways of using or finding references including books, and what informs such a process, basically. If we have something like the Neufert catalogue already set up in the libraries, how does the tool respond to that, and how does it regenerate?

Anja
When you refer to changeability and the challenge of correcting systems of categorization, I have to think of Emily Drabinski's text "Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction" (2013) which also inspired Eva Weinmayr and Lucie Kolb's research project on "Teaching the Radical Catalogue."[13] Drabinski discusses practices of knowledge organization from a queer perspective and problematizes the notion that classification can ever be corrected. According to Drabinski (2013), there needs to be a sustained critical awareness and ways of teaching catalogues as complex and biased texts. I remember the Unbound Libraries work session organized by Constant – Association for Art and Media in 2020,[14] during which Anita Burato and Martino Morandi, who are self-taught librarians working at the Rietveld/Sandberg Library in Amsterdam,[15] presented their library search tool, which allowed the users of the library catalogue to suggest new categories.[16] Thus, as someone searching

13 As one central element of this project, the exhibition *Reading the Library* (2021) focuses on feminist and decolonial approaches to systems of ordering knowledge. See sitterwerk.ch/En/Event/611/Reading_the_Library. Eva Weinmayr and Lucie Kolb developed a syllabus that instigates discovery and learning within an educational context to reveal the socially and historically produced orders and hierarchies that underlie library catalogues. See syllabus.radicalcatalogue.net.

14 Constant is a nonprofit, artist-run organization based in Brussels since 1997 and active in the fields of art, media, and technology that departs from feminisms, copyleft, free/libre, and open source software. See constantvzw.org.

15 Infrastructural Manœuvres is an ongoing project of the Rietveld/Sandberg Library that foregrounds the role and possibilities of a library's technical infrastructure, opening it up to reflection and experimentation. See www.library.rietveldacademie.nl and www.catalogue.rietveldacademie.nl/about.html.

16 Unbound Libraries was a work session organized by Constant around digital libraries and tools for the organization of knowledge that took place online from May 31 to June 5, 2020. See constantvzw.org/site/-Unbound-Libraries,224-.html.

in the catalogue, one can also make suggestions for modifications of the cataloguing system itself. The librarians would then review and apply or reject the suggestions. Their idea was to organize discussions and workshops with students and teaching staff around such suggestions. It is quite exciting to think about the changeable catalogue becoming dialogic in that way.

Alice

There is a big difference between using an existing search tool—into which you have less insight—and making something from scratch, so to speak, that integrates conversation at every step. I appreciate the possibility to pay attention to the decisions that are being made in the different phases of the process.

Sven

I wonder to what extent the idea to build something from scratch is even possible or desirable. It often feels like projects are trying to come up with something new and innovative instead of acknowledging the work done before by others and embracing the practice of building on and complexifying what already exists. I feel it's definitely also a trap we've been very aware of ourselves and we attempted to focus on the latter while making room for different perspectives and questions.

Annette

I understand Alice's comment more in terms of a search interface as a black box. And indeed, we have built upon so many existing tools, like Atria's Women's Thesaurus (Vrouwenthesaurus),[17] the Homosaurus of IHLIA,[18] and all the references that Anja mentioned. There are loads of tools or experiments of tooling that we have worked with.[19]

17 Atria's Vrouwenthesaurus (Women's Thesaurus) is a useful aid when searching by subject. It contains terms about women, gender, emancipation, and feminism. See collectie.atria.nl/thesaurus.

18 The Homosaurus is an international linked data vocabulary of LGBTQI+ terms that is intended to function as a companion to broad subject term vocabularies, such as the Library of Congress subject headings. Libraries, archives, museums, and other institutions are encouraged to use the Homosaurus to support LGBTQI+ research by enhancing the discoverability of their LGBTQI+ resources. See www.ihlia.nl/collectie/homosaurus.

19 For example, see the Feminist Search Assistant and FST meet-ups. See www.fst.hackersanddesigners.nl and www.read-in.info/fst-meet-ups.

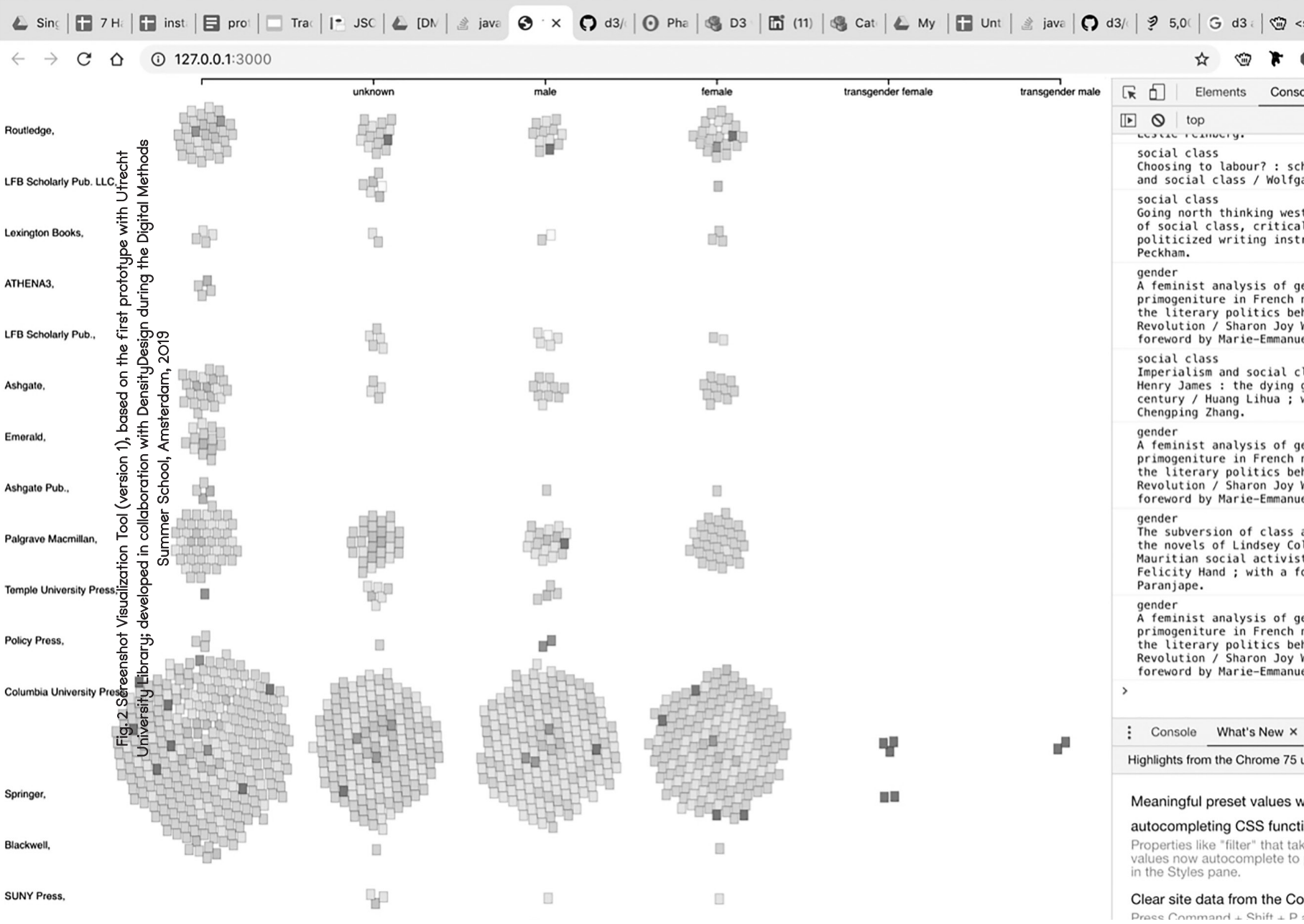


Fig. 2 Screenshot Visualization Tool (version 1), based on the first prototype with Utrecht University Library; developed in collaboration with DensityDesign during the Digital Methods Summer School, Amsterdam, 2019

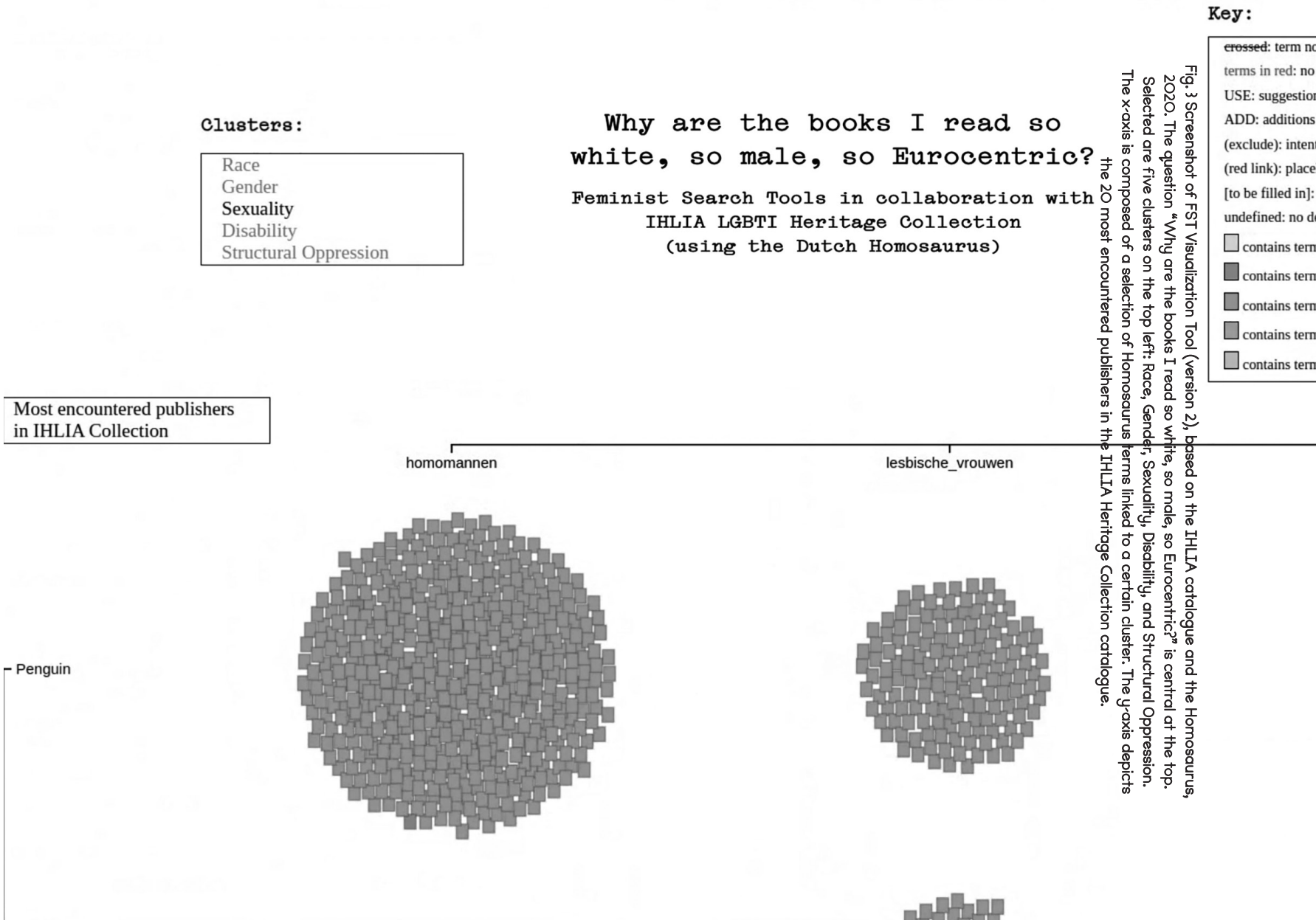


Fig. 3 Screenshot of FST Visualization Tool (version 2), based on the IHLIA catalogue and the Homosaurus, 2020. The question "Why are the books I read so white, so male, so Eurocentric?" is central at the top. Selected are five clusters on the top left: Race, Gender, Sexuality, Disability, and Structural Oppression. The x-axis is composed of a selection of Homosaurus terms linked to a certain cluster. The y-axis depicts the 20 most encountered publishers in the IHLIA Heritage Collection catalogue.

Where Does the Agency Lie within the Tool?

Laura

When it comes to user interfaces, we are so used to smooth interface designs that feel like "magic," like filling in a search window in Google, for instance. You just type something and you don't know what is happening in the backend; it just shows you the result. I was always hoping that we would do the opposite of this, or something other than that. There is a lack of agency I experience with digital tools. With non-digital tools, I don't have that feeling. I have a hammer, and I know how a hammer works. I am somehow much more frustrated as a user of digital tools. I don't know how to break that distance with such tools. I think we were trying to close that gap, but it still feels unattainable at times.

Anja

This reminds me of a subsection in our previous conversation that I wanted to speak more about: "Understanding one's own tools"[20] and the implication of ownership over a tool. Even though they are often hidden, don't our tools in a way also own us? And also, when we think about tools — for instance, software — we often think about them as separate from us. There is an alleged separation between the tool builder, the tool, and the tool user. I found it so interesting in our process — as much friction as it brought, it became very clear how a tool is actually not so separate from us. Every conversation was also informed by the tool and, in turn, shaped the tool. But also we, as a group, were shaped by its coming into being and constantly confronted with our expectations of our tool relationship.

Aggeliki

I wonder how the code could also become part of this conversation. For instance, the ways we categorized the material in the code. Creating intersectional axes practically meant we had to bring everything inside the same place.[21] Everything had to become one script. To be able to create the different axes, we connected the different terms in that script. The way we categorized the code, the file, and the scripts should also be part of that conversation.

20 See "Doing and Undoing Relationships."

21 FST is based on an understanding of feminism as intersectional. The 2016 *Let's Do Diversity* report by the University of Amsterdam Diversity Commission eloquently summarizes what intersectionality is about, introducing it as "a perspective that allows us to see how various forms of discrimination cannot be seen as separate, but need to be understood in relation to each other. Being a woman influences how someone experiences being white; being LGBT and from a working-class background means one encounters different situations than a white middle-class gay man. Practicing intersectionality means that we avoid the tendency to separate the axes of difference that shape society, institutions and ourselves" (Wekker et al. 2016, 10).

Because the code is also built on binaries and structures and is written in ways that make it difficult to complicate. It's actually difficult to find possibilities to make a split. We are not professional software developers. We just happen to know a bit of coding. We are learning through this process. I am sure the tool can be much more innovative in the way it is structured. It also needs a deep knowledge of the initial library tool. But yeah, this was an interesting process. I would actually like to see this conversation and the learning process reflected more visibly in the tool.

Annette
Which brings us back to the "conversation tool." All these conversations and encounters are so necessary because the digital tool itself makes them so invisible in a way.

Anja
But how could they become more visible? These conversations indeed became a useful "tool" for our process as they offered us committed moments of collective reflection. On the "Doing and Undoing Relationships" project website, the conversation became quite important both as a narration of the website and as a navigation. But what happens after the conversation? The idea of releasing the digital tool still seems to be a difficult subject for us. The way we go about the release is by making the process available and hyper-contextualizing it. There have always been specific people, specific organizations that we engaged with, and, to a certain extent, we also depend on them moving forward. Don't you think there is a danger of these conversations among us becoming too self-referential? In a way, we publish and release the tools through these conversations and other forms of activation such as the meet-ups. But how do we make sure that Feminist Search Tools contributes or feeds back into the communities it is inspired by?

Annette
It reminds me of how the practice of situating often resembles self-referentiality because it requires a slowing down of processes and the need for revisiting one's own practices and argumentations.

Sven
The conversations are maybe more part of the background in the digital tool itself. If we think, for instance, of the website and the project itself, we try to bring them more to the foreground. It's something to keep in mind again and again how central these questions are to the project itself.

22 See "Doing and Undoing Relationships."

Exploring Intersectional Search as a Way to Move Beyond Identity Politics

Anja

We have clarified that we understand feminism as intersectional: "avoiding the tendency to separate the axes of difference that shape society, institutions and ourselves."[22] With the last iteration of the tool we tried to literally intersect groups and axes of categorization, but at the same time also created new kinds of separations in order to make certain things legible and others not. How are those separations in fact feminist separations? And in what ways did the tool perhaps share our understanding of feminism?

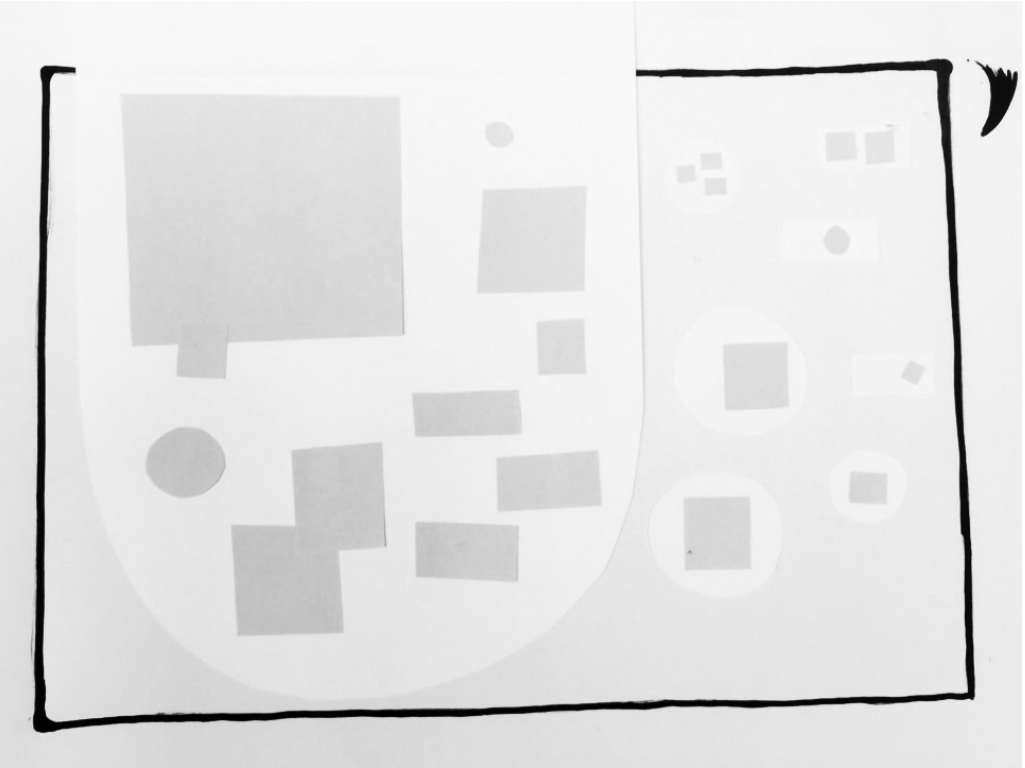
Sven

Annette and I had a conversation with Lieke Hettinga, a PhD researcher working at the intersection of trans and disability visual politics and poetics of the body, about the Visualization Tool focusing on the IHLIA Heritage Collection [see previous image]. Lieke had questioned to what extent when using the clusters of gender, race, sexuality, etc., we are just reinstating identity politics, and to what extent we are able to move beyond these categories. By looking at categories separately but also trying to find connections between them, this reminded me of the underlying tension of this project, us needing to name different categories relating to identity in our question, "Why are the books I read so white, so male, so Eurocentric?" while desiring to move beyond them. These conversations and tensions have been an important part of the process but aren't necessarily so visible in the tool as it is right now. How can we show such tensions and struggles that we come across while approaching a tool like this, make them accessible to people engaging with the tool, and have them be part of the conversation about it?

Aggeliki

I am thinking about the notion of an introverted process. I think it is important to include the people this tool refers to, but maybe not always so intensively. And perhaps people don't have to understand it completely. It's good that it's clear that when we say "tool" we aren't speaking about a tool that gives solutions to problems. For me, it's important that people understand the conversational process and that they should be part of it—and that they will also affect the tool. How can we open up a reflection of this process? How can we engage more people in this process? Maybe it's through workshops or small conversations or a broadcast? To me, this relates to feminist practice—that the tool is applied in different layers. Not only in how you make the actual tool but also how you communicate about it; how you do things and take care of the technical but also the social aspects.

Fig. 4 Paper Prototyping Workshop led by Anja Groten with the FST working group, Amsterdam 2019



Use-Value and Usability

Sven
I had to think of the metaphor that Ola brought up earlier: the tool as a disruptive mechanism of "throwing stones into a wheel," which nicely translates to the tool existing in power structures. But at the same time, I do have to admit there is also a desire around the usability of our tool, which for me stems from wanting to locate queer literature. I want to be able to find that identification in the material I am looking for, and I still find it very frustrating not to be able to find that within mainstream media outlets or libraries. So, I think we should also not so easily do away with these hopes and desires that come with the use-value of a tool. There are a lot of desires and hopes around that! I think it is also interesting to think through both. We can, of course, be critical about the efficiency and usability of a tool. But at the same time, we need to understand where that desire is coming from—wanting the tool to function and providing something to someone engaging with it as well.

Ola
The desire to actually find something cannot be separated from the rest of the commentary we made in terms of the efficiency of the tool, as you said. That's the issue. When a tool is used, it creates issues as it is being used. The desire and everything you just said are not isolated things. I think that's not hard to imagine but maybe hard to articulate—in terms of how we imagine the functionality of the tool, or how it operates within the library.

Alice
Would this be an argument against the usability of such a tool?

Ola
No, this is not an argument against usability but against the fact that we think it's not something neutral and separate. That is part of the problem. It creates and perpetuates the same issue because the tool is already something that gives analytics to the bigger body of the library. And through that, patterns are formed. And the interface responds to that. So, we are caught in an enclosure of this desire that is already informed by how the knowledge is institutionalized or how that knowledge is classified. So, I think there has to be awareness of that.

Aggeliki
The way that I envision it, it's not going to be a "beautiful" interface that is easygoing. It will show the fragments of learning that went into it.

Anja
Yes, the tool also demands a certain level of involvement, care, and commitment. It is perhaps not thought about as something

that can be finished, standing on its own, but as something that is never resolved and needs continued engagement — a practice.

Annette
For me it links back to the attitude toward the tool — toward this black box. I don't believe that we can ever have a complete understanding of any tool. But we can strive for a certain kind of literacy that supports a questioning attitude, and is dedicated to the quest for social justice. This might be crucial in order to address the complicities of the modern project of education that libraries are embedded in.

— February 17, 2021, Amsterdam

Afterword: Unlearning as a Scaffolding for Living[1]

Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike) (2012–present)

There is a key early unlearning project that does not have its own contribution in the book. Yet it is exemplary of unlearning's "double" approach to site: 1) unlearning something concrete in a specific time and place; and 2) unlearning as a working concept of bodily knowledge. *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)* took place in Utrecht and Tbilisi and involved cultural practitioners, friends, neighbors, and scholars. The exercise was to experiment with the paradox of unlearning to ride a bike, which one learns not through instruction but in practice after which, as the cliché goes, it seems impossible to unlearn.

One of the project's contexts, a one-week workshop in 2012 in Utrecht, took place in a gym to engage with unlearning more consciously as a physical activity. Equipped with exercise mats, tools, and other gymnastic apparatuses, we sat on bikes, worked with them, tinkered with them. We also brainstormed, discussed, wrote, and reflected. The gym became a site for our unlearning investigations, which included reflecting on the routines developed in classroom situations, the disciplining of bodies, habits of talking, and doing. The impossibility of unlearning to ride a bike had a great impact on us. Participant and scholar Gianmaria Colpani likened it to a "mapping device of the bodily working of learning processes" that forces us to acknowledge "for however much our language may articulate the possibility of unlearning to ride a bike, our body fails to respond" (Colpani in Chung et al. 2013, 42–43). The physical-symbolic practice of unlearning to ride a bike and its associative strength was juxtaposed with questions of how we engage in impossibilities. What are our default positions, dedications, and settled routines of thinking and doing with regard to this impossible task? Are there similarities, experiences, and feelings that remind us of engaging in impossibilities in our everyday lives? How do we engage in the (im)possibility of unlearning to ride a bike and its entanglement with cultural politics?

1 An earlier version of this text is published in Krauss 2017, 19–40.

This book's research into the politics of (im)possibilities and working through the persistence of bodily knowledges related to default positions and settled routines, is situated in this early site. Bodily knowledge refers here to the capacity of the human body to acquire social abilities that are not biologically given: that is, to learn social skills of all kinds. Feminist theoretician Susan Bordo explains an aspect of bodily knowledge through:

> focusing on the "direct grip" (as opposed to representational influence) that culture has on our bodies, through the practices and bodily habits of everyday life. Through routine, habitual activity, our bodies learn which gestures are forbidden and which are required, how violable or inviolable are the boundaries of our bodies, how much space around the body may be claimed, and so on. These are often far more powerful lessons than those we learn consciously, through explicit instruction, concerning the appropriate behavior for our gender, race, and social class (1993, 16).

Forms of embodiment are often beyond the grasp of consciousness, and can hardly be transformed voluntarily, or even made explicit. Through habitual activity they persist as though they are naturally given abilities. Bordo points to the "material body" as a site of political struggle.[2] The early acquisition of an accent or a way of sitting is usually made unconsciously and effortlessly. Learned gestures, rhythms, or postures are incorporated into our bodies, and into a particular space and time.

Literary critic Elaine Scarry (1985) investigates pain and its effect on bodies in daily life to inquire into the body's impact on a person's political subjectivity. She explores the cultural manners, taste, and dispositions that pass from one

2 This is not to say that the politics of representation of the body is not important. On the contrary, both sites of political struggle are equally important. Feminist scholars have been instrumental in developing critiques of the politics of the body in terms of the material body and its representations (Davis 1997). The term "material body" is not meant in the sense of natural or unmediated, as Bordo explains the "direct grip that culture has on our bodies" is always already made. Or, in other words, whatever function biology or anatomy have, they are always "intra-dependent" with culture (Barad 2007).

3 Scarry literally links embodied knowledge to the ability to ride a bike: "What is remembered in the body is well remembered. It is not possible to compel a person to unlearn the riding of a bike" (1985, 110). What Scarry unequivocally rejects as an impossibility actually forms a starting point of the *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)* with exploring what this impossibility does and means to the group on site.

4 With incorporations Bourdieu speaks of elements of style, manner, taste, and dispositions, as well as systems of meanings, linguistic, and social competencies.

Fig. 1 *Backwards Biking*, archive photo (Anja Groten), Utrecht, 2012. Courtesy *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)*. Photo: Laura Pardo

generation to the next in the form of daily routines and habits.[3] Scarry follows cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who also investigated the relevance of incorporations in producing similarities within groups, which he called "habitus" (1977, 53–65).[4] The materiality of the body and "habitus" form the political identity of bodies inseparably intertwined with habituated worldviews on national identity, ethnicity/race, gender, or class. My body calls me to order without me necessarily being aware of these incorporations. For this book, I borrow the term "call to order" from Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (2013) in its double meaning, as demand (by the more powerful) to undertake an activity according to particular rules and as simple, inconspicuous gesture of formally starting a meeting or a class. As the (institutional) forms of these subtle and not so subtle gestures affect knowledge production, relations, spaces, and temporalities, the sites for unlearning strive to unlearn the habitus framed by these habituated and habituating calls.

Project Acknowledgements

Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)
Collaborative experiments, mapping, video, reader, Utrecht, 2012. Collaborators in Utrecht: Hyunju Chung, Gianmaria Colpani, Anja Groten, Simone van Hulst, Annette Krauss, Sofia Montenegro, Laura Pardo, and Maiko Tanaka. Thanks to Stefano Bertacchini, and the team at Olympia Utrecht.

In the framework of 1st Tbilisi Triennial: Offside Effect. Academy as Exhibition (curated by Henk Slager and Vato Tsereteli), 2013. Collaborators in Tbilisi: Lasha Babuadze, Ana Chaduneli, Tamar Chaduneli, Hyunju Chung, Gianmaria Colpani, Tamuna Dadalisa Mchedlishvili, Elene Gabrichidze, Anja Groten, Simone van Hulst, Bessa Kartlelishvili, Annette Krauss, Chris Lee, Giorgi Magradze, Maja Malinovska, Tara McDowell, Sofia Montenegro, Mari Nakanimamasakhlisi, Christian Nyampeta, Laura Pardo, Mamuka Samkharadze, Tatia Shavgulidze, Levan Skhirtladze, Maiko Tanaka, Khatia Tchokhonelidze, Ruth Trueba Castro, Vato Urushadze, Koka Vashakidze, and Miya Yoshida.

Fig. 2 *Collectively Biking*, archive photo (left to right: Vato Urushadze, Elene Gabrichidze, Hyunju Chung, Maiko Tanaka, Levan Skhirtladze, Khatia Tchokhonelidze, and Sofia Montenegro), Tbilisi, 2013. Courtesy *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)*. Photo: Annette Krauss

Unlearning Forms of Organization

The material body is structured by material, sociopolitical, and historical forces, which, as anticolonial philosopher Frantz Fanon reminds us, are embedded in a heritage of colonial racism that comprises the "bodily schema." On the quasi-naturalness of bodily knowledge, Fanon writes:

> I know, if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit, but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my self as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world (1986, 111).

Fanon transfers the "implicit knowledge" that brings him to smoke, to the experience of a Black[5] person "in a white world" (*ibid.*, 110), who is very likely to not develop their bodily schema as quasi-natural or implicit. This person is forced to inhabit what Fanon describes as a "third-person consciousness" wherein "[t]he body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty" (*ibid.*) due to the obstacles thrown at non-white bodies in white-dominated places. On whiteness, philosopher Shannon Sullivan notes that there seems to be "no historico-racial schema at play in the constitution of her lived body" (2004, 14). The historico-racial bodily schema that is disruptive for a Black person's lived experience is often enabling and supportive for a white person. Bodily forms of knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes are not perceived as results of learning processes of a white, male, abled body, but as neutral and universal. For Sullivan (*ibid.*, 15), implicit bodily knowledge for a white person favoring a body full of possibilities, is likely to be explicit knowledge for a Black person foreclosing possibilities.

5 In the following I write the words Black and Person of Color in title case. I am following a discourse that proposes a capitalization to denote and support the political term Black and Person of Color that exceeds provenance and appearance. The usage of these terms relates to persons that do not identify as white, and do not exclusively relate to European-Western-Christian cultures and their traditions and ideologies (see Amoo-Adare 2014, 8; Kazeem and Schaffer 2012, 177).

Why do I connect unlearn to ride a bike with Fanon's inescapable historico-racial body schema, when participants in the *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)* can at any time choose to quit? After all, not much is at stake for an enabled body at the site. The intent is rather to direct attention toward a white person unlearning normalized historico-racial bodily schema. A privilege of whiteness is dealing with racism as a matter of choice. A white person can decide to stop engaging with racism, a non-white person does not have this choice. Furthermore, unlearning to ride a bike resonates with this premise in the im/possibilities that surround this endeavor. *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)* is a rather unsatisfying practice for unlearning habits of thinking and doing that sustain normalized historico-racial bodily schema. However, it has drawn my attention to other socio-ethico-aesthetic formations, of which the different contributions in this book speak.

The intention of this book is to look into social organizations, and our participation within them. More specifically, I look at the role of habits of thinking and doing, including implicit knowledges, that sustain white dominance and white supremacy, and how they call each other to order. Based on these premises, I ask, what does a specific practice of unlearning these habits and implicit knowledge look like in everyday life in the middle of Europe?

I work with a specific understanding of racism, namely a white, scientifically legitimated system of thought invented in Europe and the colonies with atrocious consequences. From (t)here, white supremacy has been engineered through specific modes of social organization, and habits of thinking and doing. I refer here to critical race and gender studies scholar Philomena Essed. She understands this racist system as "ideology, structure and process in which inequalities are related in a deterministic way, to biological and cultural factors such as race and ethnic group" (1991, 43), with inscribed concepts, notions, and terminologies prevalent in European cultural history.

Considering the scope and (historical) impact of racist structures in life, practices of unlearning are confronted with the sheer impossibility of these endeavors. The need to unpack impossibilities and the (infra)structures that enable these, have become pivotal to unlearning, which in practice are what I call "routines of the impossible." This writing and the practices that precede it intend to unlearn these routines that give the title to this book.

Fig. 3 *Losing the Fear of the Ground*, archive photo (Annette Krauss), Utrecht, 2012.
Courtesy *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)*

Unlearning and Institutions

In this unwieldy relationship between unlearning and the impossible, a focus on artistic practices with and within (educational) institutions is grounded in knowledge and education as sites of struggle. Trying to find out what is (im)possible in these sites of struggle and taking our own assumptions and prejudices (the collaborators' and mine) as an integral part of it, has been a guiding force. Institution here encompasses "integrated systems of rules that structure social interaction" (Hodgson 2006, 3–6), including both formal institutions generated by (legal) entities such as governments *and* informal institutions, such as customs, routines, and patterns important to a certain community. These strands are inseparably entwined, as artist Andrea Fraser, protagonist of institutional critique describes: "So, if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a 'totally administered society' or has grown all encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside of ourselves" (2005, 104). The sites for unlearning

become litmus tests with regard to unquestioned, or ineptly questioned routines, hierarchies of knowledge, and the role of the body in unlearning processes.

More than describing activities in institutions to understand them, following feminist scholar Sara Ahmed's work on institutional life and racism, it is crucial to explore how these activities shape institutions. Ahmed connects institutions and routines, arguing that "when things become institutional they recede from consciousness. To institutionalize is [...] to become routine or ordinary" (2012, 21).

In the text "Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)," the earlier introduced notion of *call to order* is explored in relation to institutional habits, and brought together with Essed's concept of "everyday racism," which does not separate the institutional from individual racism that are rather about "different positions and relations through which racism operates" (1991, 36). That division places the subject outside the institutional framework and at the same time detaches the regulations and procedures from the people who make and enact them. Essed puts forward the mutual interdependency of macro and micro racism where institutional settings are construed in ideas and practices in everyday life and vice versa (*ibid.*, 38). Bringing the analytical framework of call to order and everyday racism together provides a lens onto what these collaborative practices are exposed to, and what and how they/I expose others to, and am/are complicit in. Furthermore, the collaborations become manifest in specific modes of address toward and inhabitation in the institutions while contributing to how they might operate differently. "[R]ather than suggesting that knowledge leads (or should lead) to transformation," as Ahmed writes, the sites for unlearning attempt to generate a different kind of "knowledge of institutions in the process of attempting to transform them" (2012, 173).

Compared to the institutional investigations and practices that infuse *Site for Unlearning (Zwarte Piet)* (2011–present), *Hidden Curriculum* (2007–present), or *Site for Unlearning (Art Organisation)* (2013–20), *Site for Unlearning (to Ride a Bike)* seems more like basic research (*Grundlagenforschung*) that misses institutional contextualization and embeddedness. Together the experiments form a support structure—a scaffolding for living—for the collaborative research with and into institutions when it comes to dominant forms of thinking and behaving, (affective) structures of impossibilities, and their entanglement with embodied knowledges.

Unlearning aims to intervene in yet another institution: the institution of learning, the standard notion of, according to OED Online, "acquir[ing] knowledge or

skills as a result of study, experience and teaching." With knowledge and learning increasingly shaped by economic forces, my practice of unlearning involves the study of how certain forms of learning permeate Western academic and artistic research, and their mediation. An acquisition-based, accumulative concept of learning connects smoothly with models of growth within these economies and intertwines with concepts of progress that have long bolstered received ideas of historical development and social evolution. Decolonial scholarship (Escobar 1995; Allen 2016; Vázquez Melken 2020) investigates the entanglement between concepts of progress and colonialism, with scholarship tracing progress concepts to the moment Europe declared itself superior to other people and cultures, using these concepts to legitimize oppression, expropriation, and extraction of resources. As intervening in a Western standard notion of learning is a massive undertaking, I work at a small-scale with an eye toward the big, in concrete (institutional) settings with the sites for unlearning as frameworks. Critiques offered by feminist, de/post/anticolonial studies strongly inform this artistic investigation into unlearning, insofar as they address academic canons, corporeality, coalition building, forms of institutionalization, and everyday norms as a central part of their agendas.[6]

Unlearning and Arts-Based Research

My practice has long been committed to both artistic practice and academic theory. Through the investigations into unlearning I work across and speak to their relationships. Western academic and scientific research and related understandings of art are commonly understood as tied to the "European project of modernity,"[7] with universities and (art) academies at the forefront of the dissemination of knowledge and its (geopolitical) production processes (Wilder 2013). As such, research is deeply embedded within the troubled histories of Western epistemologies, and is connected to its histories of articulations in the name of dominant majorities, the privileged, and the colonizers. In this context, research and education are often construed as dependent on better analyses or more

6 For my use of the terms anticolonial, decolonial, and postcolonial, see footnote 2 of "Introduction and Acknowledgements: Practicing Unlearning" on page 12 in this book.

7 Postcolonial scholar Talal Asad sees modernity as a series of interlinked projects that certain people in power seek to achieve; it aims at institutionalizing a number of principles, such as human rights, democracy, civil equality, consumerism, freedom of market, and secularism (2003, 13).

knowledge to forge something that will "right wrongs" (Spivak 2004). But what if, as decolonial scholar of education Vanessa Andreotti (2015, 36) urges, "these wrongs are not only a result of ignorances but of something more collective and much deeper that we are all implicated in?" Accepting this force, Andreotti points out, is the starting point for decolonization.

Scholars such as Spivak (1990), Andreotti (2011; 2015), Madina Tlostanova/Walter Mignolo (2012), and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (2019) have identified unlearning at the core of postcolonial, decolonial, and anticolonial research,[8] and education, intervening in and unsettling the imperial foundations of Western knowledge production. What links these scholars is the description of coloniality as constitutive of modernity and vice versa. Modernity does not emerge solely from European history, but takes into account the concept of coloniality (Quijano 2000), which refers to modes of control of social life, economic and political organization, and ways of thinking and sensing that emerged through colonialism, slavery, and capitalism in colonies in the Americas, Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia from the beginning of the sixteenth century (Gilroy 1993; Quijano 2000). Recognizing the modern-colonial matrix of power, Quijano and Mignolo describe it as a system that determines the management, institutionalization, and dissemination of epistemic, material, and aesthetic resources in ways that reproduce modernity's imperial project. Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) assign to unlearning the capacity to respond to these modern-colonial challenges. Consequently, unlearning has always also been a project about institutions and education.

These studies inform my artistic practice and arts-based research and involvement in activism and help me unpack complicities with the modern project of research. In this writing, arts-based research (interchangeably used with artistic research) is understood as a specific form of artistic practice combining practice-based, and theoretically driven investigations constituted from personal-political and transdisciplinary methodologies. Cultural theorist Estelle Barrett and artist and theorist Barbara Bolt describe this form of research as "practice-led enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary methodologies and practices" that have the potential to address, problematize, and rework "the frontiers of research" (Barrett 2007, 4). By combining these features, I tie in (arts-based) research that generates practices and writings in dialogue with methodologies, practices, and concepts from other fields to explore its premises and ways of understanding.

8 See my elaboration on the use of de/post/anticolonial practices and theories in footnote 2 of "Introduction."

Sites for Unlearning as Situations

From the perspective of my artistic practice, the sites for unlearning are process-driven and encourage attention be directed toward the entanglement of materiality, practice, and discourse. The sites work with an expanded notion of performance, which I understand as a site of group coordination (including human and more-than-human actors) in different spaces and at different times. The sites are best described as the "making of unlearning situations." It is important that the word "site" is derived from the term situation and being situated, rather than from a simply spatial understanding. Next to the decolonial perspective of unlearning, the sites tie in the legacy of (artistic) situationist practices and the feminist approach of "situated knowledges" theorized by feminist philosopher of science Donna Haraway (1988).

The artistic engagement with situations brings up a whole range of artistic practices that question static object conventions and attempt to contribute to "new forms of Situationism" (Bishop 2012; Doherty 2004; Jackson 2011). A key reference for the sites for unlearning has been the early Situationists' experimental practices from the 1960s and 1970s, one being the "constructed situation," which is described by the Situationist International as "a moment of life, concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events" (unsigned 1958, 13). Conceived as collectively produced experimental activities in urban environments, constructed situations aim to unhinge normalized ways of thinking and living in people's everyday life. In *Society of the Spectacle* (1970), filmmaker and writer Guy Debord theorizes constructed situations as counter-practices against the alienation, repressive instrumentality, and divisive effects of capitalism (1970, 66, 70). Debord and the Situationist International tried to inhabit a radical anti-capitalist position while at the same time refusing rational critique and argumentation. Instead, they emphasized playfulness, irrationality, and games that avoided elements of competition and work against the separation of art from everyday life (Debord 1957).

In juxtaposition to this, the sites are also deeply influenced by what Haraway coined "situated knowledges" (1988), as alternatives to scientific objectivity in research. Haraway argues against the idea of the researcher as neutral, unbiased, and disinterested. According to her, knowledge is constructed, rather than discovered. This means that theories, ideas, and practices are always produced within specific situations that are at once historical, disciplinary, socio-cultural, and

political. A key element of her approach is what she calls the "critical positioning" of the feminist researcher (*ibid.*, 589). Critical positioning is practiced through three interconnected aspects: 1) "limited location" refers to a continuous striving to know about the limitations of one's own structural position as a researcher;[9] 2) "accountability" toward different constituencies;[10] and 3) "partiality of vision." This third aspect is "not partiality for its own sake," however. It rather expresses that being incomplete triggers reactions, evokes resonances, and engages with the notion of difference. Moreover, situated knowledges are not to be confused with relativism. According to Haraway, "[t]he alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledge sustaining the possibility of webs of connection called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology." The communal and connective quality of knowledge production is pivotal here. Haraway articulates a clearly defined goal, namely "knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination" (*ibid.*, 583–90).

The sites for unlearning attempt to bring together the three elements described: the practice-oriented artistic approach of situation making, a feminist understanding of situated knowledge production, and the questions and demands posed by de/post/anticolonial scholarship. In this regard, the sites are not imagined in the language of alienation and rather embrace the terminology of interdependence. They aim to collaboratively examine the spatio-temporal, embodied, and material relationalities inherent to situations, that are sustained by reproductive labor, and challenged by questions of maintenance. The sites are specific experimental settings for making unlearning situations, and at the same time studying what makes a site. "Situation-making" is a reminder for me that there is (only) so much that we can do to make a situation. We are always already part of a specific situation, its orientations and power relations, as much as this situation is in the making and therefore to be shaped. The term situation attempts to give consideration to this mutuality, ecology, and multi-directionality by introducing situation as both subject and object of the making. Thus, we/I make

9 Kum-Kum Bhavnani explains her understanding of limited location "that the researcher analyses the micropolitics of the research situation. That is that researchers explore, in public, what power dynamics come into play and when, how they shift, and what their consequences might be in the many different parts of their research" (2007, 643).

10 Bhavnani adds the notion of reinscription, of "the feminist being publicly aware of the prevailing images of the research groups and examines whether her own research reinscribes the group into dominant stereotypes" (2007, 642).

a situation and the situation makes us/me. A multi-actor approach is crucial to these collaborative experiments. Against this backdrop, the sites for unlearning are proposed as formations that connect (and struggle with this connection of) artistic practices, bodily routines of thinking and behaving, everyday life with sociopolitical, material, spatio-temporal, aesthetic, and economical questions including the role of institutions.

Writing

The different settings, time frames, and fields of the sites and collaborations have implications for the possibilities to write (about) these sites. While I wish to experiment with writing unlearning, at times, I cannot but write *about* unlearning as a way of looking back on or revisiting these sites again. Therefore, I introduce the bracketing of *about* in the research question: how can I write (about) unlearning? This question has been leading my writing that constitutes parts of this book. And then, how do I relate to the practice of writing? Even though writing is an important part of my practice, it is not primarily the practice through which I do what I do. More importantly, what I grapple with, I aim to through collaborative practices—for example, with and in institutions. Reading books and diving into theory at best makes me vigilant and sharp—and sometimes gives me refuge—in order to approach the experiences, questions, and paradoxes that I encounter in practice. And it works the opposite way too: the collaborative endeavors and corresponding practices make me wary and savvy about reading and writing texts. These practices follow each other, appear simultaneously, or get lost with each other. Writing, in my case, is a way of literally coming to terms. It is a process of finding and giving words, also together, to the different collaborative processes, in which I am involved, to the connected experiences and sensations. These terms enter working processes to be challenged again. A few times now, writing (in various forms) has taken place collaboratively, and more often in conversational forms. Both ways are precious processes that contribute in their very own manner to the processes of the collaborations. For example, some of these collaborative writings are integrated in *Unlearing Exercises* (2018) or "In the Vortex of Institutional Lives," the Feminist Search Tools conversation, and KUNCI's letter exchange.

In the collaborations, we equip ourselves with some provisional terms, which are only to be (con)tested again in practice. Sometimes these written systems seem to be a step ahead or several steps behind the collaborative practices; sometimes they do not seem to touch the work we do at all and feel like detours. At times they come close to each other, but they are hardly the same. Or to say it in other words, the complexities of writing (and written texts) are not the same as the complexities of the other practices, but they build an invaluable ecology between me, the collaborators, and the sites. Through the bracketing of "(about)" I try to complicate the *about* in writing (about) the sites for unlearning. For me, it is a reminder of the representational trap and ethical question of the *about* and directs me toward how these different practices correlate with and permeate each other.

Furthermore, this writing is not to be understood as a comprehensive study of processes of unlearning. On the contrary, what the different contributions in this book engage with are context-specific questions, forms of knowledge and approaches that inform the work on unlearning considering its material, artistic, and political dimensions. The composition of the contributions aims at letting them speak to each other, because it is in the resonance with each other where the force of unlearning unfolds.

Unlearning and Collaboration

Collaborations provide invaluable scaffolding for the sites for unlearning with the aim to unlearn something together. They differ in collaborators, interests, motivations, economies, and rhythms. Consequently, the forms function differently in the various contexts. Still, on these grounds, why would it be important to think and do unlearning through collaboration? There are various answers to this question that touch upon conceptual, political, and personal aspects.

One of the recurring difficulties with approaching unlearning and learning is the implicit individual attribution that un/learning seems to contain—as if it is (entirely) up to an individual person to (consciously or unconsciously) learn and unlearn. The economization of learning (in the framework of knowledge economies) is grounded in and perpetuates the individualization of learning. The epitome of this understanding of learning is human capital, and I focus on this in the chapter "Lifelong Learning and the Professionalized Learner" in *Unlearning Exercises:*

Art Organizations and Sites for Unlearning (Krauss in Allen et al. 2018). The sites for unlearning engage and experiment with forms of collectivity to investigate the potential to intervene in the economic and individualized understanding of learning and unlearning.

Most of all, engaging with unlearning is a practice in *how to relate*—to collaborate is a practice of relating in specific contexts. To investigate in and work on how we relate to each other (human, and more-than-human) is certainly not without contestation and conflict. Working collaboratively provides the possibility that others challenge the way I assume these relations too easily. This, in turn, might inform the way I engage with hierarchies, differences, and conflicts in these contexts. Hence, the spatio-temporal, embodied, and material *relationalities* through which forms of collaboration emerge, are at the same time that which the collaboration attempts to shape toward unlearning. It is within and through these relationalities that "situation-making" unfolds and challenges the routines of the impossible. And yet, we have to pay attention to another institution, that of collectivity. What are the limits of a collectivity that undergirds sites for unlearning?[11] To study and intervene in modes of working and living together is at the core of collaborative unlearning. These ways can hardly be shared as models but as instances that serve as references or in best case as inspirations for others to develop their ways of collaborating.

11 See also Harney and Moten 2013, 147.

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Biographies

Aggeliki Diakrousi is an artist and researcher with a background in architecture and experimental publishing. Her work examines the politics of public spaces entangled with the use of technology and includes critical collective approaches to digital infrastructures. She is a former member of Varia and teacher at Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. She is currently a research assistant at the Institute for Technology in the Public Interest (TITiPI). www.w-i-t-m.net.

Sven Engels received a Master of Arts in Gender Studies from Utrecht University and Bachelor of Arts from University College Maastricht. They have been involved with unlearning in different capacities, including Unlearning My Library, which builds on the research of Read-in, in the context of the Zero Footprint Campus in Utrecht from 2017 to 2018.

Anja Groten works as a designer, writer, and educator. Her work revolves around the cross-section of digital and physical media, design, and art education and her involvement in different collectives. In 2013 Groten co-founded the initiative Hackers & Designers. Since 2019 she is head of the Design Department at the Sandberg Instituut Amsterdam. In 2022 Anja obtained a PhD in Artistic Research at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts, Leiden.

Hackers & Designers (H&D) is a non-profit workshop initiative organizing activities at the intersection of technology, design, and art. By creating shared moments of hands-on learning H&D stimulates collaboration across disciplines, technological literacy, and different levels of expertise.

Ola Hassanain leads a critical spatial practice as a visual artist with architecture training. Hassanain premises her work on an idea of "space as political discourse," an expanded notion of space, that tries to develop a spatial literacy that can aid us to imagine different of political ecologies. Hassanain's development of critical spatial practice is partly informed by her post-academic training: a residency at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunst, Amsterdam, 2021–23; a fellowship at BAK – basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, 2017–18, teaching and development of the Blacker Blackness Master course, Sandberg Instituut,

Amsterdam, 2021–23, teaching at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht in the Fine Art Department; and other international collaborations with venues such as the 2019 Chicago Architecture Biennial and Sharjah Architecture Triennale.

Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide is senior exhibitions curator at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven where her recent shows are *Sung Hwan Kim: Protected by roof and right-hand muscles* (2023–24), *Positions #7: Everything worthwhile is done with other people* (2023) curated with Nick Aikens, and *A Lasting Truth Is Change* (2022) for which she co-edited the eponymous publication with Taylor Le Melle. She is co-editor with Aikens of *I Think My Body Feels, I Feel My Body Thinks: On Corpoliteracy* (2022) among many other publications.

Nancy Jouwe is a cultural historian and works as a freelance researcher, speaker, and curator. She is a 2022–25 fellow at the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht and a PhD candidate at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. She co-edited several books plus articles on topics relating to the arts, intersectionality, colonial history, slavery and its afterlife, and diasporic socio-cultural movements.

Annette Krauss works as an artist, writer, and educator. Krauss has (co-)initiated various long-term collaborative practices (*Hidden Curriculum*, 2007–present)/ *Sites for Unlearning*, 2011–present/Read-in, 2010–present/*Read the Masks. Tradition Is Not Given*, 2008–12/*School of Temporalities*, 2013–present). These projects reflect and build upon the potential of collaborative practices while aiming at disrupting taken for granted truths in imagining and living forms of collectivity. She worked as course leader of the Master Fine Art at the University of the Arts Utrecht, and since 2023 has been part of a co-professorship for Art and Communication Practices, University of Applied Arts Vienna.

KUNCI Study Forum & Collective based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia is a non-disciplinary research collective, which, since its founding in 1999 has been experimenting with modes of producing and sharing knowledge through studying together.

Laura Pardo is an artist and lecturer who received a Master of Arts in Artistic Research from the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht and Bachelor of Art in Fine Art from Universidad de Los Andes, Bogotá. She is a lecturer at Breda University of Applied Sciences.

Read-in is a self-organized collective that began in 2010 and which experiments with the political, material, and physical implications of collective reading and the situatedness of any kind of reading activity. Read-in experiments with formats such as going door-to-door and requesting neighbors host a spontaneous collective reading session. With Bookshelf Research, Read-in examines private and public libraries according to categories such as gender, nationality, and materiality, engaging with the open secret of knowledge hierarchies that inhabit our bookshelves and reading practices. www.read-in.info.

Alice Strete is an artist and researcher interested in the intricate relationship between humans and the technologies they surround themselves with. Her work involves collaborative media art and publishing practices and explores topics from feminist technologies to the sociopolitics of food.

Ferdiansyah Thajib is a Berlin-based member of KUNCI Study Forum & Collective, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. KUNCI is a non-disciplinary research collective, which, since its founding in 1999, has been experimenting with modes of producing and sharing knowledge through studying together. Currently he is a Senior Lecturer at the Elite Master Program "Standards of Decision-making Across Cultures," Friedrich-Alexander University, Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany.

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essays, collective conversations, and scenes on what unlearning might do and be. Together they form a support structure — a scaffolding for living — for practicing unlearning.

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What are the struggles, entanglements, and joys of practicing unlearning in predominantly Western contexts? This book responds to this question through revisiting the artistic research projects *Sites for Unlearning*, (co-)initiated by artist Annette Krauss. The sites are experimental gatherings where the aim is to collaboratively unlearn dominant forms of thinking and doing, and the affective production of impossibilities within institutions in order to intervene in social injustices. The artistic projects are accompanied, framed, and challenged by invited